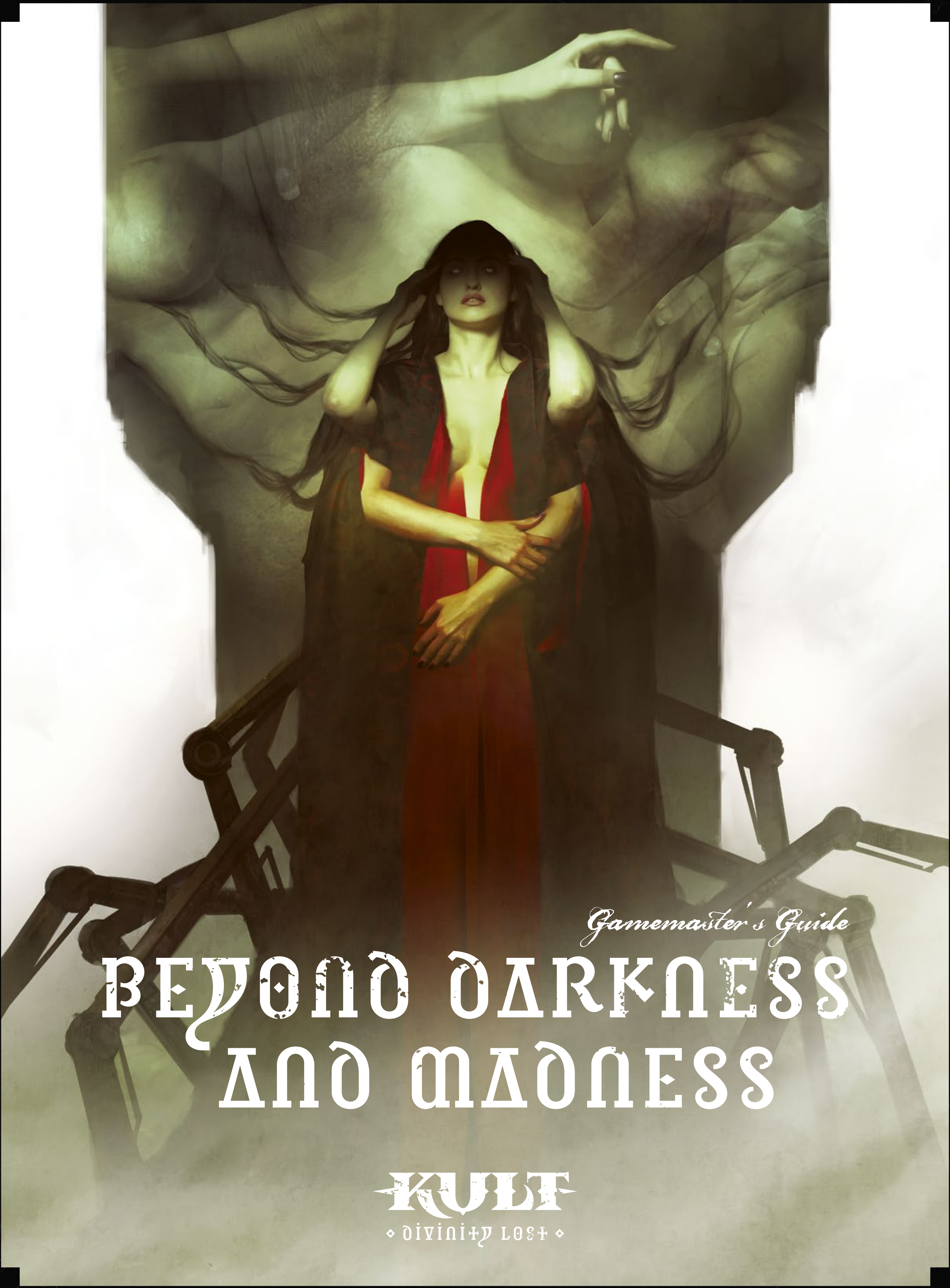

Gamemaster's Guide

BEYOND DARKNESS AND MADNESS

KULT

DIVINITY LOST

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Gamemaster's Guide

KULT

◆ DIVINITY LOST ◆

8 INTRODUCTION
9 Foreword
10 Not an Instruction Manual
10 A Game for Adults
11 The Gamemaster's Responsibilities
11 Establishing the Horror Contract
14 Safety Techniques
16 Mediography

BOOK I: STORYTELLING

20 1. THEATER OF THE FEARFUL MIND
21 Overview
21 Collaborative Storytelling
24 The Spiral of Horror
24 The Conversation
33 The GM Moves
35 Hierarchy of Horror
39 The Rhythm of Horror
43 Running the Session
44 Advanced Storytelling

46 2. FOUNDATIONS OF DREAD
47 Overview
47 The Intrigue Map
54 Events
58 Bombs
60 Dramatic Hooks
62 Downtime
66 Themes
71 Writing Campaigns

76 3. FLESH AND SOUL
77 Overview
77 A Pantheon of Mortals
82 Flesh and Soul
86 Personality Types
94 Relations
97 Legions of Darkness

106 4. PILLARS OF THE FALSE HEAVEN
107 Overview
107 Environmental Storytelling
114 Putting It All Together
116 Location Archetypes
125 In Metropolis's Shadow

132 5. ARCANA AND APPARITIONS
133 Overview
133 Objects of Desire and Dread
138 Artifacts
144 Our Fears Made Flesh

BOOK II: ATMOSPHERE

152 6. OF FEARS UNKNOWN

153 Overview

153 Existential Dread

154 Lies upon Lies

157 Loneliness

158 Thanatos

161 In the Mind's Eye

163 Glimpses of Truth

164 Glimpses of Other Worlds

168 In Our Jailer's Grip

178 7. DISTURBING BEHAVIORS

179 Overview

179 Transgressive Souls

183 A Litany of Violence

184 The Center Cannot Hold

186 The Devil Beside Me

187 Own Worst Enemy

189 The Reality of Pain

192 8. NEW FLESH, ANCIENT DESIRES

193 Overview

193 No Flesh Shall Be Spared

195 Body and Mind

198 Psychoplasmics

200 We are the Gateway

202 Our Traitorous Flesh

204 Tearing Down the False Temple

205 More Human than Human

207 Fate Worse Than Death

208 9. EXQUISITE HORRORS

209 Overview

209 The Sublime

210 Aspects of the Sublime

218 Alarming Sensory Perceptions

220 Morbid Attraction

222 10. PRISONERS OF THE SELF

223 Overview

223 Bound, Caged, and Abandoned

BOOK III: REFLECTIONS

234 11. GODS AND MONSTERS
235 Overview
235 Agenda
236 Principles
238 The Fiction

240 12. DARKNESS AND DECAY
241 Overview
241 Agenda
242 Principles
244 The Fiction

246 13. ILLUSIONS AND SORROWS
247 Overview
247 Agenda
248 Principles
250 The Fiction

252 14. BLOOD AND GUTS
253 Overview
253 Agenda
254 Principles
257 The Fiction

258 15. WE UNLUCKY FEW
259 Overview
259 Agenda
260 Principles
262 The Fiction

264 16. AFTERNOON HORRORS
265 Overview
265 Agenda
266 Principles
269 The Fiction

APPENDIX

272 USING THE KULT TAROT
272 Ways to use the Tarot as a Gamemaster
273 Basic Guidelines
273 The Ritual of the Tarot
274 Reading Templates
276 The Major Arcana
284 The Minor Arcana

INTRODUCTION

THE SPRAY PAINT FELT TACKY ON MACK'S FINGER, THICK AS DRYING blood. LOOK! The graffitied word glistened like an unanswered challenge. Whoever'd tagged the wall had skills to reach this secluded rooftop. And they had some balls to mark her territory. But where were they?

Mack crossed the metal gangway between buildings, ignoring the winds tugging at her jacket. Far beneath her feet, the city street churned; an angry river of light, motion, and summer heat. Yet, on the other side, the air grew colder, almost autumnal. The rooftop's mechanical stink surrendered to fragrances of spice and incense. An infinite silence coiled around her. Another tag stained the high-rise's wall in wet, ruddy colors. LOOK!! A crude arrow pointed upwards. Instincts, old and primal, told her to run.

But Mack found herself ascending. There, she discovered an impossibility; an archway rising from the rooftop like an organic growth. Although framed by vibrant skyline, its interior revealed nothingness – a starless void that rippled like oil. She sensed something watching her from that impenetrable dark. "Look," it said. She did. And the darkness swallowed her whole.

FOREWORD

Welcome to **Beyond Darkness and Madness** – the gamemaster's guide for ***KULT: Divinity Lost***. This supplement outlines the gamemaster's (GM's) in-game obligations and responsibilities, including upholding the *Horror Contract*. Furthermore, it provides them with useful tools for managing the conversation and their Moves, and offers insights and inspiration for creating their own characters, stories, and settings. To this end, the supplement is divided into three books; ***Storytelling***, ***Atmosphere***, and ***Reflections***.

BOOK ONE – Storytelling

KULT: Divinity Lost stories can – and should – possess continually evolving narrative levels, requiring the GM to be prepared before, during, and after each game session. Book One provides the tools and inspiration for upholding the GM's Agendas, as well as offers new Principles and Moves to achieve them. In addition, tools for maintaining and expanding the game's fiction will be provided, allowing the GM and players to personalize their experience.

Chapter One – Theater of the Fearful Mind discusses how to construct compelling stories, sustain an effective conversation, and uphold the Agenda. Tools for effectively using the Principles and fiction are discussed. These include effectively using soft and hard GM Moves, as well as generating Moves unique to each story. An in-depth discussion on establishing the *Horror Contract* is provided, including specific techniques for invoking fear in the players. Finally, suggestions for understanding the players' motivations and weaving them into the story will be discussed throughout.

Chapter Two – Foundations of Dread further explores the Intrigue Map and downtime, as well as techniques for generating and sustaining both short- and long-term story arcs. Additional tools for creating bombs, events, and Dramatic Hooks are provided, including how they can enhance the conversation. Finally, advanced GM techniques are discussed, such as new storytelling styles, running generational campaigns, and developing alternative settings.

Chapter Three – Flesh and Soul provides the tools for generating dynamic non-player characters (NPCs), such as Contacts and Leaders. This includes how to develop their narrative roles throughout long-term campaigns. In addition, the chapter provides additional tools for creating comprehensive Cults, Groups, and Organizations, as well as how these hubs can be woven into the underlying narrative and Intrigue Map.

Chapter Four – Pillars of the False Heaven discusses how to create believable and detailed places, i.e., locations. Additionally, this chapter outlines how to introduce the various Influences and Higher Powers into these locations, as well as using GM Moves to enhance the narrative. Finally, the chapter provides the tools for combining places into dynamic campaign settings, such as towns/cities – both real and imaginary.

Chapter Five – Arcana and Apparitions provides new tools for developing new objects and monsters, as well as using them as story-centric elements. In addition, the chapter discusses how these hubs can become integral to the player characters (PCs) and how they can expand the overall narrative.

BOOK TWO – Atmosphere

While characters, settings, and plot-lines are vital to telling successful stories, the GM must infuse their narratives with *atmosphere* to push them to the next level. The world of ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** drifts between several types of horror, ranging from the grotesque to the sublime. The Atmosphere chapters provide the GM insights into each sub-genre, as well as the tools and techniques for incorporating them into their stories.

Chapter Six – Of Fears Unknown explores the complex concepts of modern cosmic horror and existential dread as well as their effect upon the PCs and their perceptions. It provides tools and inspiration for weaving these unsettling themes into compelling narratives. The chapter also includes an in-depth analysis of the Influences and how the Higher Powers and Realms affect Elysium and Humanity as a whole.

Chapter Seven – Disturbing Behaviors explores the concepts of extreme horror and graphic violence. The chapter provides the tools and guidance for striking the proper balance between disturbing and repulsing the characters (and players) with unsettling imagery and situations. The chapter also explores various styles of extreme horror and ways to portray the realism of pain.

Chapter Eight – New Flesh, Ancient Desires explores the transgressive concepts of body horror and eroticism, delving into the corruption and transformation of body and self. The chapter discusses the various themes and narratives involving the Flesh, and provides tools for introducing the transformative aspects of horror. Finally, it explores the issues of roleplaying sexuality and intimacy, while adhering to the *Horror Contract*.

Chapter Nine – Exquisite Horrors explores the narrative concepts of the sublime, an aesthetic literary technique where beauty and horror mesh together. Heavily rooted in gothic horror, the sublime's atmospheric and philosophical ideals are naturally infused within the *KULT* mythos. The chapter provides tools for developing these ideas, and expressing them throughout the game's narratives.

Chapter Ten – Prisons of the Self gives the gamemaster a guide on how to handle trauma in play and explore the inner horrors of the player characters.

BOOK THREE – Reflections

Despite *KULT: Divinity Lost's* diverse metanarrative, the gamemaster and players may desire to augment or redesign the game-world to better suit their personal desires and tastes. By personalizing the Agenda, Principles, and fiction, gaming groups can explore new Reflections of the *KULT* mythos. Through these divergent frameworks, the GM can develop specialized storylines and entire campaigns, ranging from quiet horrors to splatterpunk apocalypses. Book Three provides various Reflections of the *KULT* universe, incorporating themes and play styles associated with common horror sub-genres. These are by no means the only possible versions, and each can be used to create unique campaigns and one-shot stories. GMs are free to adapt and combine the following suggestions to create their own unique worlds.

Chapter Eleven – **Gods and Monsters** stories focus heavily on supernatural elements, which frequently intrude upon the characters' lives. The Illusion has fractured, allowing creatures to invade and populate Humanity's prison. They fight hidden wars, trying to preserve Elysium or tear down its walls forever. Indeed, the characters themselves may be these monsters, entangled in the endless conflicts between Archons and Death Angels.

Chapter Twelve – **Darkness and Decay** stories empathize the Uncanny; focusing upon the subtle and strange rather than using the overt horrors inherent with the *KULT* mythos. Mystery and ambiguity infest the narrative, slowly pulling the characters down into madness and mistrust, where reality itself comes into question.

Chapter Thirteen – **Illusions and Sorrows** stories focus heavily on the precepts of Asian horror cinema and literature, infused with magical realism, urban terror, and unrelenting dread. This style of narrative blurs the lines between reality and the supernatural.

Chapter Fourteen – **Blood and Guts** stories focus on the frenetic pacing and high-octane sequences of action-horror. This reflection shifts away from character-heavy explorations to focus on more plot-driven storylines. Be it splatterpunk nightmares or hordes of undead, these narratives grab the players by the throat and never let go.

Chapter Fifteen – **We Unlucky Few** stories focus on characters staying alive against insurmountable odds in horrific situations. Characters are outmatched, outgunned, and lack vital resources, as traumatic and world-changing events continually test their resolve and resourcefulness.

Chapter Sixteen – **Afternoon Horrors** stories focus on young adults stumbling into mysteries and nightmares; players portray children in the *KULT* universe. They learn their world isn't as it seems, discovering secrets about their hometown and themselves as they hunt monsters.

APPENDIX – The Kult Tarot

Tarot Rules, a guide on how to use the *KULT* tarot deck to create stories, locations and scenarios.

NOT AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL

This supplement is *not* an instruction manual. Don't feel pressured to use and learn everything presented here. This book is a color palette that you can use to accent your stories. Each chapter, each section offers different nuances; you can dip your brush, mix the colors, and apply them to your game. You can try different techniques and combinations to enhance your stories and inspire specific atmospheres.

However, if you try using all these narrative techniques and accents at once, it would become overwhelming and your game could lose all nuance. As such, this information is offered as aids and suggestions, something you can draw upon and experiment with as you see fit. You can tweak and twist and toss anything presented within this book, molding your game in whatever way best serves your individual stories. Mix genres, alter rules, and create the world you desire.

A GAME FOR ADULTS

If you open the *KULT: Divinity Lost* core rules, you will see the following text: *This game is for adults*. So, what do we mean by *adults*? There are several answers. The primary one refers to the player's age and life experience. In short, due to the game's dark subject matter and intense setting, *KULT* is unsuitable for younger audiences. However, *adult* also means that the authors expect the GM and players to have the maturity and willingness to participate and cooperate in telling an intriguing story together. That you don't behave immaturely and try to sabotage and ruin the experience for others.

We trust the *gamemaster* to be adult and not play *KULT* as some sort of power trip, ignore the players' boundaries, and use the game as a vehicle for self-fulfillment and/or bullying.

We trust the *players* to be adult, accepting and trusting enough to place their characters in the GM's hands, as well as in each other's. They should understand that the game's ultimate goal is to create an impactful story, and that it is not about winning/losing, but rather about narrative exploration and experiences.

We trust the *group* – the GM and the players – to be adults, and create a safe environment with an atmosphere of sharing and trust, where *everyone* feels safe enough to touch upon the sublime darkness and explore beautiful, intimate, and grim stories together. The group should respect the boundaries that have been established, and also maintain an open non-judgmental mind towards each other. Trust that you are in this together, trust that things will not go beyond the boundaries that are set, trust that you are not going to be shamed, judged, ridiculed, or seen as an annoyance.

We also trust the *group* of adults to handle communication in a mature manner. The GM and player must remember that if things feel wrong and uncomfortable that they should discuss their feelings rather than complain about it later or to others. We trust you to give each other honest feedback, verbal or written, between or after sessions. Open conversation about what works and does not work is – and should be – encouraged. This is particularly important if a boundary is broken, someone goes too far, mistakes are made, as these are matters adults can handle and talk about rationally.

Gamemasters putting together a gaming group for the first time must explain to potential players that *KULT* is an adult game and what that entails. To help with this there are tools provided, such as the *Horror Contract*. Above all else, adult behaviour and good, and open, communication is key.

KULT is a game about personal horror, but neither the players nor the gamemaster should fear to play it.

Not to Everybody's Taste

In *KULT: Divinity Lost,* the gamemaster and players are collaboratively telling the story. Throughout the game, the player characters remain the narrative's primary focus, and the GM should be their fan and stay on their side, even as she guide them into truly dark places.

However, games as dark and haunting as *KULT* inevitably feature stories that some will find too unpleasant to partake in. It might involve subject matters that are just too personal and/or unpleasant for them. *And that is perfectly okay*. Some subject matters are simply too sensitive and horrifying, or they may trigger unpleasant experiences from the past. No one should force others to partake in something that is destructive; be they GM or player.

That being said, there might be stories, quick play scenarios, or campaigns that involve subjects the GM (or players) may want to explore that will clash with aspects of the ***Horror Contract***. *And that is perfectly fine.* Not everyone needs to be involved in every game. So, if there are stories that you want to explore, be certain to involve the right gaming group and don't feel bad when suggesting players sit this one out. By their nature, horror stories are not meant for everyone. However, *do not* use this as an excuse to bully or push players out of the group, or force them into something they'd be uncomfortable with.

THE GAMEMASTER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

At its heart, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** is a collaborative roleplaying experience shared between its participants – the GM and players. While the players are responsible for portraying their individual characters, the GM must represent the game-world itself: characters and setting, alike. However, the game's collaborative nature alters the GM's overall role, as compared to more traditional RPGs. In short, successful games require the GM to simultaneously serve as the game's adjudicator, creator, and narrator – prior to, during, and following each game session. Although undertaking these roles may initially appear challenging, with patience and persistence, they can be infinitely rewarding.

Adjudicator

As an **Adjudicator**, the GM is responsible for being familiar with the game rules, as outlined in the ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** corebook and any materials/supplements used by the gaming group. This general knowledge allows her to ensure the rules are employed in a consistent and unbiased manner during each game session, as well as assist players in using them properly. The interactive and interpretive nature of ***KULT*** allows individual groups to add, alter, and/or eliminate rules as best fits their play style. As such, the GM must approve and adjudicate any rule changes specific to the group and introduce them to new players. Finally, she's responsible for maintaining player involvement and safety, as outlined in the group's *Horror Contract*.

Creator

As the **Creator**, the GM is responsible for developing non-player characters, monsters, and settings, and weaving these aspects into the story. Unlike many traditional RPGs, she is not responsible for creating every narrative element and plot-line. ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** is a collaborative effort in which players help drive the story. As such, the GM needs to establish the underlying narrative, so she can help guide the conversation toward its best, logical resolution. Part of this responsibility includes outlining and maintaining the Intrigue Map, as well as creating compelling hubs and links. Extended campaigns require more hands-on preparations from the GM, as they develop intricate subplots and multilayered storylines.

Narrator

As the **Narrator**, the GM is responsible for maintaining the conversation throughout the game session. Different from her Creator responsibilities, the GM describes the world and its various aspects as the narrative progresses. On one hand, this responsibility requires properly using specific game mechanics, such as GM Moves, to expand the storyline and reflect consequences of the PCs' actions. On the other hand, it also requires her to respond intuitively and fairly, as she maintain the story's fiction. Above all else, as a Narrator, the GM must collaborate with the players to create compelling narratives – rather than present stories specific to her own desires.

ESTABLISHING THE HORROR CONTRACT

KULT: Divinity Lost games should all respect the *Horror Contract* – the mutual agreement between the GM and players to explore mature themes and terrifying concepts (***KDL***, p. 160). Being scared can be fun, thrilling, and even cathartic for the players. However, as with carnival rides and horror movies, these fearful and unpleasant situations are best experienced in a protected and controlled environment. Similarly, when running ***KULT***, the GM has the dual responsibility of scaring the players and providing them a safe environment.

Although these responsibilities can be achieved through common-sense practices, *outlining the boundaries* prior to gameplay and using various *safety techniques* are also helpful. This is the very essence of the *Horror Contract*, which provides the GM (and players) the proper framework for exploring the nightmarish world of ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, while providing the players the safest roleplaying environment possible. For this reason, the *Horror Contract* is *essential* to all ***KULT*** games, be they one-shot or campaign.

Outlining the Boundaries

The *Horror Contract* should be established prior to or at the beginning of the first session (*KDL*, p. 172). This helps the GM and players set the boundaries for their stories, and will provide insights into what narratives and themes they wish to explore – or avoid – early on. In addition, this collaborative agreement allows the players an opportunity to request concepts and ideas that will challenge and frighten them throughout the role-playing experience, intensifying their investment in the game itself. It also provides GMs with insight into what pre-generated scenarios the players may wish to alter or avoid all-together.

Specifically, the GM and players should establish two key elements of the *Horror Contract*: *What They Fear* and *What Is Forbidden*. This allows the GM to *Know Their Players* by learning what narrative elements will frighten them and which are strictly forbidden. Although ***KULT*** stories *Dare to be Unpleasant*, the GM must respect the players' boundaries to establish the safest and most enjoyable roleplaying experience. Nor are they entitled to explanations, even if they seem odd. The player's word is final; the *Horror Contract's* purpose is to create the safest 'terrifying' gaming experience possible for the players.

What They Fear

Although they portray characters, each player possesses their own fears. By recognizing and reflecting these personal anxieties, the GM can increase the player's tension and draw them deeper into the story. The players themselves can infuse these fears into their characters, exploring them through Dark Secrets and Disadvantages during gameplay. Again, this creates investment in the narrative, increasing their disquiet and unease.

In short, What They Fear is the players' wishlist for their KULT experience. Each player notates what subjects they want to frighten them. They should try and write more than just one word. As an example, writing "Claustrophobia" can help the GM but if they try to describe why they fear it and what emotions are connected to it, then they give the GM much more to work with. With the player's consent, the GM can ask additional questions to better *Know the Player*.

To continue the example with claustrophobia: After elaborating and having been asked some questions from the GM they establish that the sound of a door locking is enough to cause discomfort in the PC. Together they decide that this will be connected to the PC's Dark Secret and the player decides to pick ***Phobia*** as one of their Disadvantages.

Doing this has given the GM several tools to use in the game:

- The GM adds "Claustrophobia" to the PC's Dark Secret on the Intrigue Map.
- "Claustrophobia" is added to the "What They Fear" part of the *Horror Contract*.
- She makes a mental note to emphasize the sound of locks whenever the PC's **Stability** has dropped a few steps.
- The Move "***Separate Them***" and "***Capture Someone***" can now be made more impactful by connecting them to the PC's ***Phobia***.

What is Forbidden

Although ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** explores many dark subjects, the GM and players are not compelled to roleplay themes that offend or upset them. Both the GM and the players add things they don't want to see in the fiction. These themes are compiled together and listed on the *Horror Contract*, so the group knows they are forbidden and not to be introduced under any circumstances, even off-screen. This will help the GM and players shape their specific narratives, as well as initial character creation. Furthermore, if they are accidentally introduced by players during gameplay, the GM simply states that the topic is "forbidden," and requests the player alter the scene appropriately. No explanation is required.

What is Forbidden should not be used to eliminate integral aspects of the ***KULT*** mythos; e.g., "I don't want the Archons to be a part of our game." Instead, the actions/effects of these narrative aspects would be restricted. For example, forbidding "sexual violence and/or the ramifications thereof," might limit stories involving the Death Angels Chagidiel and Gamaliel, but they'd still remain in the general fiction. Similarly, characters with ***Sexual Neurosis*** may be unsuitable for that particular game. The GM and players should simply proceed with respect and understanding.

Evolution of Horror

As a general rule, the GM can introduce concepts/themes not yet adressed as Feared or Forbidden into the narrative. However, she should still use common sense, drawing guidance from the group's specific *Horror Contract*. Furthermore, as the game progresses over the long term, the group may wish to amend their specific *Horror Contract*, adding or subtracting themes from the *Fear/Forbidden* lists.

Prior to each session, the GM can ask if the players wish to amend the *Horror Contract*. If no amendments are required, the session proceeds normally. If amendments are requested, The *Horror Contract* is then adjusted accordingly. Note, *unless every player consents*, no Forbidden themes should be removed – only added. The GM should remain cognizant of these changes, and change the story appropriately.

Similarly, the GM may wish to provide content warnings for each session, if she has specific themes she wish to introduce. This allows players the opportunity to request amendments, if necessary, without disrupting the story mid-game. She may also wish to add *Forbidden* themes to the *Horror Contract* herself. As above, she does not need to explain this amendment; only inform the players of the required change.

Author Note: The core rulebook for *KULT: Divinity Lost* is cited throughout this supplement. For all page citations marked *KDL*, please refer to material in the core rulebook (ex: *KDL*, p. 160). All other page citations reference material within this supplement.

SAFETY TECHNIQUES

Due to its horrific subject matter, roleplaying in ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** can be intense and uncomfortable at times. As such, in addition to the Horror Contract, the GM and players have several safety techniques available to them. The group may utilize one, some, or all of these at your table. Simply discuss which are best suited for your particular group, and implement them as you see fit. However, whichever technique is decided upon becomes sacred – if someone uses it, everyone supports their request without question. As always, each group is free to ignore these suggestions and employ their own safety techniques. They may also wish to view online resources such as the ***TTRPG Safety Toolkit***.

Please note, it is important for these techniques to be used in *conjunction* with Horror Contract. Many tools can only come into effect and/or be used after an issue has occurred, which may be too late. By adhering to the Horror Contact, the GM and players should be able to prevent most problems before they happen.

Fade to Black

As with cinema and literature, some subjects are best left to the imagination and handled off-screen. Explicit sex and violence can be as equally effective, if not more so, when suggested rather than handled in explicit detail. This technique is known as *Fade to Black*, and can be used throughout the game's narrative to alleviate unnecessary discomfort. Similarly, if the GM and players do not want to narrate every awkward or unpleasant scene, they can request a *Fade to Black*, and the narrative progresses to the next part of the story.

One PC has been stabbed and is slowly bleeding out. Another PC lends him medical aid. Rather than focus on the gory details of the injury and pain, the players request the GM have the scene *Fade to Black*. The wounded PC simply passes out from the pain and the scene progresses after he wakes up later on.

The Stoplight System

The *Stoplight System* provides the players with an in-game method to communicate their comfort levels without breaking narrative flow. Each participant is provided with a sheet, marked with three, colored circles (or panels): green, yellow, and red. These colors demonstrate the player's response to the narrative's varying levels of intensity, and how the GM should proceed. The player taps (or says) the color according to their feelings toward the current scene:

[A] **Green** – The player approves, and wish the scene to become more intense;

[B] **Yellow** – The player approves, but wants the intensity to stay the same;

[C] **Red** – The player disapproves, and needs the intensity to decrease or stop entirely.

Similarly, the GM can use the *Stoplight System* to silently ask the players how they're feeling about the scene. She simply taps each color in order – green, yellow, red – and the players can respond in kind to indicate their current comfort level.

Note, this technique can result in conflicting opinions. No matter the consensus, the GM must respect the player with the lowest intensity level. For example, if two players tap 'yellow,' but another taps 'red,' the GM must decrease the scene's intensity.

THE OK CHECK-IN

Similar to the *Stoplight System*, the *OK Check-in* employs quick hand signals to indicate the player's current feelings. During intense scenes, the GM and/or players can check in on each other by flashing an 'OK' symbol with their fingers. In kind, the person being checked in on responses with either: 'thumbs up' – *I'm fine, continue*; the 'thumbs down' – *I'm not okay, stop*; or a hand-wiggle – *I'm so-so, unsure*. Anything other than a 'thumbs up' temporarily stops play, allowing the responder the moment to calm themselves and the group reassess the scene's progression.

The Door Is Always Open

More unspoken policy than safety technique, the GM and players should make sure the *Door is Always Open*. If anyone needs to stop playing for *any* reason, they are free to do so after indicating it to the group. The session remains on pause until the GM/player either returns or leaves the group. Typically, the *Door is Always Open* policy is used in conjunction with other safety techniques, or when the GM or players need to leave the session for personal reasons.

Stopping game-play and/or leaving the session can feel socially awkward and potentially embarrassing. However, doing so is the individual's right and completely appropriate. Nor does the individual need to explain their reasons; only indicate that they are doing so to the group. As always, use common sense and protect yourself.

GM Safety

While player safety is important, the GM is entitled to the same rights as anyone else at the table. Unfortunately most gaming traditions dictate that the GM's duty is to assure that only the players are always safe and having fun. This stems from the unspoken social dynamics of traditional roleplaying games, where the GM is granted more power than the players. In turn, the GM may feel obligated to fulfill her role as arbiter and creator, even to her own detriment.

In truth, being the GM can be an emotionally and mentally exhausting task, especially if players test the boundaries of *Horror Contract* and the game-environment. As mentioned above, they are entitled to utilizing the same safety measures as the players. Furthermore, they are under no obligation to continue the session, nor do they need to continue running the group, if the experience turns toxic for them.

Due to the pressures and responsibilities inherent with their role, GMs may find it difficult to recognize issues and/or extricate herself from potentially harmful situations. However, it is well within her rights to end any game where the group does the following:

- Actively ignores the GM's comfort level, demanding they explore *What is Forbidden* and/or ignores the use of safety tools.
- Does not respect the GM's schedule, such as bullying them to run games and/or demanding private scenes when inconvenient.
- Judges the GM and makes the GM feel unsafe in such a way that it feels like the GM hamper oneself and does not dare to create and explore.
- Insults, ridicules, and/or threats the GM out-of-game, as well as argues continually to get their way.
- Uses the game for therapeutic reasons and/or to explore their fantasies/kinks without established consent.

Debriefing and Feedback

Debriefing is a post-game safety technique typically used in conjunction with the suggestions above. Although roleplaying can be easy, returning to reality may be more difficult, especially during emotional sessions. Debriefing allows the GM/players time to calm down and return to their own lives. As such, when the session concludes, the GM/players put the game materials and characters away, disengaging themselves from the roleplaying space. Removing any unnerving 'ambience' the group used such as soft music and food/drink can help reestablish the sense of normalcy.

Debriefings are freeform and do not have set time periods. However, following particularly intense sessions, the group may need additional time to relax and recover. From this point, the players should address themselves as their *personal identities*, referring to their characters only in the third-person. Again, this helps return the group to the real world.

The GM may also use this time to gather general feedback on the session. Feel free to use some, all, or none of the following questions. Make up some of your own and/or let the players ask you and themselves. Allow for free discussion without argument or judgement; fair criticism should be welcome. Note, this is also the GM's moment to relax and unwind, to savor a job well done. Don't allow the feedback to ruin the experience.

What did they think was the highlight of this session? What were their favorite character interactions? What surprised them and why? What storylines are they excited about? Did they like how things resolved themselves? Could something be improved and/or make the game more engaging? Do they have suggestions for the next session?

ACCEPTABLE RESOLUTION

No matter the medium, all horror stories share one thing in common – they have *resolution*. For good or ill, the narrative ends at a recognizable and acceptable point. However, due to the time constraints of roleplaying games, stories may need to end prematurely and/or may not resume for some time. The GM must resolve the current story thread at an acceptable point prior to ending the game session. While it may be tempting to end on a cliffhanger, some unresolved issues can potentially upset the players.

KULT: Divinity Lost explores deeply troubling and traumatic themes. Although the players are not actually engaging in and enduring these horrors, their characters are – and that emotional connection can be just as real and difficult to turn off. As such, always ask if the players are comfortable with the current state of the narrative when ending the game. If they are not, allow them some form of resolution during the Debriefing. This narrative technique helps prevent the GM/players from being left confused, frightened, or emotionally vulnerable by ending the session on an abrupt and unpleasant note.

THE X CARD

The X card is another common safety technique in roleplaying games. Briefly, a card or sheet of paper with an "X" drawn on it is placed in the middle of the table. At any point, a player or the GM may touch the X card to call a halt to any action currently making them uncomfortable. If they would like to explain themselves, they may, but it is absolutely not necessary and the GM should continue play once everyone is settled back in.

However, the X Card's binary nature effectively halts the conversation and directly alters the story. For some, this can be disruptive to the narrative, as it allows little room for nuances inherent to the horrors of *KULT: Divinity Lost*. GMs using the X Card should familiarize themselves with their group's Horror Contract and be prepared for any eventualities.

MEDIOGRAPHY

Here below is a reference list of books, games and movies for each genre and chapter in this book. Use these to inspire your conversation or as pure enjoyment.

Of Fears Unknown

- Perfect Blue (1997)
- Prince of Darkness (1987)
- The Endless (2018)
- Silent Hill series
- The Cat Lady/Downfall/Lorelei
- Soma
- The God-Machine Chronicle (Onyx Path)
- Unknown Armies (Atlas Games)
- The Hollower by Mary SanGiovanni (2013)
- House of Leaves by Mark Danielewski (2000)
- Annihilation by Jeff VanderMeer (2014)

Disturbing Behavior

- Martyrs (2008)
- Kill List (2011)
- I Saw The Devil (2010)
- Hostel (2005)
- Slasher (Onyx Path)
- Outlast
- The Evil Within
- The Hellbound Heart by Clive Barker (1986)
- American Psycho by Bret Easton Ellis (1991)
- The Scream by John Skipp & Craig Spector (1987)

New Flesh, Ancient Desires

- The Void (2016)
- Spring (2014)
- Videodrome (1983)
- The Thing (1982)
- The Fly (1986)
- The art of H.R. Giger
- Bloodborne
- Franken Fran (2006)
- Cthulhutech (Mongoose)
- The Troop by Nick Cutter (2014)
- The Books of Blood by Clive Barker (1984)
- Jackalope Wives by Ursula Vernon
- Body by Shelley Jackson

Exquisite Horrors

- Bluebeard's Bride (Magpie Games)
- Itras By (Vagrant Workshop)
- Paranoia Agent (2004)
- Carnivale (2003-2005)
- Hellbound: Hellraiser II (2008)
- Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (1992)
- The Lighthouse (2019)
- Sauna (2008)
- Imajica by Clive Barker (1991)
- Labyrinths by Jorge Luis Borges (1962)
- The Last Days of New Paris by China Miéville (2016)
- A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful by Edmund Burke (1757)

Prisons of the Self

- Trauma and Recovery by Judith Herman (1992)
- Trauma Magic by Clementine Morrigan (2020)
- The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende (1982)
- Dirty River: A Queer Femme of Color Dreaming Her Way Home by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2015)
- Sharp Objects by Gillian Flynn (2006)
- Midsommar (2019)
- The Babadook (2014)
- Jacob's Ladder (1990)
- Relic (2020)
- Hereditary (2018)
- Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice
- Fran Bow

Gods and Monsters

- American Gods by Neil Gaiman (2001)
- Weaveworld by Clive Barker (1987)
- Bloodchild by Octavia Butler (1995)
- The Sandman (Vertigo Comics)
- Dresden Files by Jim Butcher (2000-2021)
- Hellboy series by Mike Mignola
- Locke & Key by Joe Hill (2008-2013)
- The Secret World
- Shin Megami Tensei: Persona series
- Bioshock series
- Chronicles of Darkness (Onyx Path)
- Dreaming Cities (Guardians of Order)

Darkness and Decay

- Mulholland Drive (2001)
- Twin Peaks (1990-91, 2017)
- Blue Velvet (1986)
- Pi (1998)
- The Serpent and the Rainbow (1988)
- Naked Lunch by Williams S. Burroughs
- Rule of Rose
- Condemned
- Falling Angel by William Hjortsberg (1978)
- Don't Rest Your Head (Evil Hat Productions)

Illusions and Sorrows

- Uzumaki by Junji Ito (1998)
- The Wailing (2016)
- Kairo (2001)
- Ringu (1998)
- Maribeto (2004)
- Audition (1999)
- Higurashi When They Cry (2006-2021)
- World of Horror
- Siren
- Corpse Party
- Fatal Frame
- Kuro (Cubicle 7)

Blood and Guts

- The Descent (2005)
- Aliens (1986)
- Event Horizon (1997)
- Train to Busan (2016)
- Dawn of the Dead (2004)
- Monster of the Week (Evil Hat Productions)
- Delta Green (Pagan Publishing)
- Resident Evil series
- Dead Space series
- The Bridge by John Skipp and Craig Spector (1991)
- One Rainy Night by Richard Laymon (1991)

We Unlucky Few

- The Road by Cormac McCarthy (2006)
- A Paradise Built In Hell by Rebecca Solnit (2010)
- The Girl with All the Gifts by M.R. Carey (2014)
- The Fireman by Joe Hill (2016)
- The Rising by Brian Keene (2003)
- The Last of Us
- This War of Mine
- Death Stranding
- 28 Days Later (2002)
- Metro 2033 (2002)
- Threads (1984)
- It Comes at Night (2017)

Afternoon Horrors

- Kids On Bikes (Renegade Game Studios)
- Tales From The Loop (Free League Publishing)
- H. P. Lovecraft Preparatory Academy (Third Eye Games)
- Stranger Things (2016-2021)
- Coraline (2009)
- The House with a Clock in Its Walls (2018)
- Yomawari: Midnight Shadows
- Something is Killing the Children by James Tynion (2019-2021)
- The Goosebumps series by R.L. Stine
- The Coldest Girl in Coldtown by Holly Black (2013)
- Nightschool by Svetlana Chmakova (2008-2010)

BOOK

STORY

I:

TELLING

CHAPTER 1

THEATER OF THE FEARFUL MIND

Tabitha startled awake. Harsh lights flooded her eyes, antiseptic stink stung her nose. Still at the hospital, then. Double shift. She'd barely sat up before someone called her again, "Nurse!" The new intern stood in the doorway, frantic. Izzy wasn't it? "It can't be time yet," Tabitha said, sliding off the staff room's couch. Izzy's face was ashen, "Someone came in. It's... they're bad."

Tabitha sighed, following the shaken girl to the emergency room. This late, most beds remained empty. People hovered nervously near the end room. Why aren't they with the patient? Angrily, she brushed by them. Even in dim light, Tabitha knew the woman was dead. Half her face was missing, little more than blood and broken bone. Arms and legs lay at impossible angles.

Tabitha began retreating. Until the dead woman reached out for her. One hideously aware eye stared out of that ruined face. Words bubbled up, wet and whisper-soft, "Please, take this. Before it's too late. You'll know what to do." Something fell from her broken fingers, coming to rest on the scarlet bedsheet. Tabitha meekly picked up the fallen object, examining it. And her stifled scream finally clawed itself free.

OVERVIEW

As discussed in the *Introduction*, the gamemaster (GM) is responsible for acting as *Adjudicator*, *Creator*, and *Narrator*. During each game session, much of the GM's time is fulfilling the latter role. This chapter discusses how to encourage collaborative storytelling, inspire and tell compelling narratives, and direct the conversation throughout each session. Tools for upholding the Agendas and Principles are provided, as well as suggestions for changing them to create new fictions. In addition, the GM Moves are discussed in better detail, including how to generate unique Moves. An in-depth discussion on the concepts of horror in roleplaying is provided to enhance the *Horror Contract*. Finally, advanced storytelling techniques are provided to heighten the roleplaying experience.

COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING

KULT: Divinity Lost is a collaborative storytelling experience, where the GM and players work together to create unique – and terrifying – narratives. Presented as a conversation, each game session explores stories infused with personal horror and trauma, revealing the darkness within and without. However, unlike more traditional roleplaying games, these stories are developed and told *mutually*, even when based on pre-generated scenarios. The conversation's narrative freedom can be initially strange for GMs and players accustomed to more structured formats.

Each session of *KULT: Divinity Lost* should strive to entertain and thrill, guided by the group's shared desires, i.e., the *Horror Contract*. As such, the GM and players shouldn't feel constrained to tell specific narratives, as this is her unique game. Their collaborative story should feel genuine and meaningful to all involved, allowing them to become engaged in the experience. Furthermore, their personalized game is free to evolve over time; the GM and players are encouraged to discuss and reevaluate what themes they wish to introduce and/or remove.

The GM can encourage collaborative storytelling by inspiring **Strong Identification** and introducing **Compelling Conflicts**. These methods also help invest the players in the game, maintaining their interest from story to story. In turn, this allows the GM to build further upon their ideas.

Strong Identification

While good stories can entertain us momentarily, great stories resonate with us long after they're told. These stories possess true depth and profound meaning, touching us on a genuinely emotional level. Usually, this intimate relationship stems from our strong identification with the characters and their experiences. In collaborative fiction, the players undertake the roles of these characters, inhabit their skins, and experience their trials and tribulations firsthand. By encouraging an empathic connection, the GM invests the players more deeply with the narrative itself, making the PCs and their world feel more real. In turn, this personalized identification intensifies the horror, thus increasing their tension.

Bring the Shared World Alive

We are shaped by the people and world around us; our personalities are revealed through these interrelationships. Similarly, realistic characters and settings help create compelling stories, making their narrative more alive and memorable. When developing locations and non-player characters (NPCs), the GM should invite the players to contribute in the storytelling process.

Ask questions about these plot elements and how they're connected to the player characters (PCs). What are the location's memorable qualities? What personal aspects make an NPC unique? Does the character respond positively or negatively to them, and why? Even in pre-generated stories, invite the players to contribute their own perspectives and suggestions, and thus personalize their roleplaying experience. Build upon their input, making the world vibrant and real to the players, and investing them more deeply in its continued portrayal.

Additional world-building techniques for NPCs and places are discussed extensively in subsequent chapters, ***Flesh and Soul*** (p. 76) and ***Pillars of the False Heaven*** (p. 106).

The Fixer regularly frequents the local park. The GM asks the player, "*What is your favorite feature there? Use a one-word theme you associate with it?*" They detail the gazebo off the main paths, where he watch the ducks. His theme is *Innocence*, as he came here before he began his unsavory livelihood.

Establish Normalcy

From the first page, literary stories build upon well-developed surroundings and character backgrounds that existed long before the instigating moment. This sense of normalcy helps root the reader in the setting by creating familiarity and investiture. Similarly, through collaborative storytelling, the GM and players can establish the characters' lives prior to the current narrative. What are their routines? Who are their friends and acquaintances? What are their homes and workplaces like? By exploring what is normal for the PCs, they reveal personal connections and details, and add realism to the game world.

However, normalcy does not necessarily mean undramatic. Characters can have troubled pasts, personal difficulties, and fraught relationships. While these daily issues can stem from their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages, players are encouraged to develop more mundane tribulations. Do they have an unpleasant boss? Is their ex-partner causing them grief? Do they have bills stacking up? Did their car break down? Although minor in the grand scheme, these everyday problems enhance the character's portrayal and player investiture.

An established normality reveals stronger contrasts, providing additional impact to the narrative's horrific events, as well as enhance the *tension/release cycle* (p. 39). In longer stories, these contrasts reveal the differences between the characters' conventional lives and their altered reality, shattered by the horrors they've experienced. They'll never be fully comfortable, allowing the GM to more easily establish player tension through subsequent threats to their existence.

As the session begins, the GM prompts ***The Veteran's*** player, asking them to describe the PC's morning routine. They describe the cafe he frequent, two blocks from his apartment. The owner also served in the military, so she supports their business, even though the coffee is awful. The GM notates this, fleshing out the NPC and some regulars ***The Veteran*** knows. Later in the game, the player uses these connections to assist the PCs.

Compelling Conflicts

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the GM and players collectively explore disturbing and frightening narratives. Many of these unnerving stories originate from compelling conflicts between the PCs and an opposing force that disrupts their lives, individually or together. As the PCs seek to overcome these conflicts, the narrative is driven forward, empowering the collaborative storytelling process. In this process, the PCs' desires and personalities are revealed, exposing their inner natures and testing their resolve. By exploring these conflicts, the GM and players can expand the PC's background, adding realism to their portrayal. This helps the group enhance their shared fiction, and inspire their mutual participation in the conversation.

In some cases, these conflicts can represent the story's central motivation. In other instances, they accent the main plot-line, serving as Dramatic Hooks and/or bombs (p. 60 and 58). This collaborative storytelling process can also inspire new hubs and links on the Intrigue Map (p. 47), generating roleplaying opportunities and further expanding the narrative. Finally, these personalized conflicts can reflect the current narrative, acting as contrasts and metaphors, adding nuance to the overall story.

CONFLICTS OF SELF

In *conflicts of self*, the character struggles against his internal nature. These conflicts usually involve incorporating his beliefs, perceptions, motivations, and internal weaknesses. These can be personal stories of self-discovery, transformation, and ascension. The conflicts can also include confronting the PC's Dark Secrets and Disadvantages. By their very nature, conflicts of self are integral to most KULT stories, on one level or another.

Conflicts of self may be ingrained, representing the PC's past traumas and self-doubts. However, when the story begins, mitigating factors should push the personal conflict to the forefront, forcing the PC to deal with it. Furthermore, as the conflict progresses, the PC's responses may be externalized, creating additional problems and tension to their existence.

- **Maturation**: The PC's circumstances conflict with his beliefs and self-perceptions. He may accept or deny this new reality, struggling with his decision.
- **Moment of Truth**: The PC's Disadvantage directly and negatively affects his normal life, forcing him to either confront it or succumb to it.
- **Losing Control**: The PC's darker desires and impulses threaten to overwhelm him. He must overcome these feelings or spiral into self-destruction – or harm those he care about.
- **True Nature Revealed**: Circumstances threaten to reveal the PC's hidden self to the world. Will he accept the consequences or fight to maintain his secrecy?
- **Self-Realization**: The PC is confronted with the negative consequences of his actions. He's forced to reflect upon himself and his previous exploits.

CONFLICTS WITH SOCIETY

In *conflicts with society*, the PC enters into an external conflict with an element of his community, such as personal relations, individuals, and groups. These can also involve the cultural and social traditions affecting and constraining the PC, including political and government agencies, religious organizations, and communal groups. Conflicts with society motivate the PC into action by testing his personal beliefs and morality and force him to reexamine his place in the world.

These conflicts may originate from friends, family, and strangers alike, imposing their will upon the PC. Societal concepts and values, which are at odds with the PC, also fall under this category. As they narratively progress, conflicts with society can reveal the failures and flaws of humanity, and the PCs themselves. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, these stories may include *conflicts with the supernatural*, as the externalized Principles corrupt and motivate society itself. By weaving these concepts together, the GM can add new context and depth to normally accepted viewpoints.

- **Fear Thy Neighbor**: The PC is at odds with his community, due to differences in belief, culture, or lifestyle. Does he succumb to peer pressure or fight for his rights, risking reprisals?
- **Fear of Intimacy**: The PC's romance slowly falls apart when his partner places restrictions on their relationship. Which is more important, being loved or being true to one's self?
- **Growing Pains**: Family members impose their beliefs on the PC, which is antithetical to his own philosophies. Does he risk his family's disapproval and act in his own interests?
- **Acts of Injustice**: The PC witnesses an act of injustice, inflicted by the local authorities and/or people in power. Interfering will surely cause negative consequences for him. Does he stand up against this tyranny or become complicit in the repressive society?
- **Trials of the Heart**: The PC's lover acts out against societal conventions, risking ridicule and retaliation. Does he shun his partner or support their actions, even if it means undermining his own social status?

CONFLICTS WITH THE WORLD

In *conflicts with the world*, the character is confronted with existential threats such as natural disasters, warfare, or socio-political and technological changes. Due to the far-reaching nature of these external conflicts, the PCs typically play minor roles in the progression and resolution of events. However, the conflict's effect upon the PCs is no less profound. For example, while PCs cannot personally overcome city-wide riots, they may involve themselves by confronting faction leaders or by rescuing someone caught in the fighting.

The conflict's grand scope serves as the backdrop to the PCs' personal experiences; its interrelated events shape their lives directly and indirectly. Their true challenge lies in how they overcome the times of tumult and deal with their changed world. As such, these events may also create *conflicts of self*, as the PCs' beliefs are challenged and tested. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, these grand threats may also involve *conflicts with the supernatural*, originating from the realms and/or Higher Powers.

- **The Nul-Generation**: A death cult gains power through social media, inspiring people to commit mass murder. Random acts of violence and self-destruction spread, causing mass panic and paranoia.
- **The Storm**: An unprecedented storm descends on the city, shattering its infrastructure and overwhelming its emergency resources. The PCs find themselves trapped in the chaos.
- **The Losing Side**: Radical forces overtake the government, imposing repressive and questionable restrictions on the country. The PCs must decide to resist this oppression or buckle under its weight, as they have little hope of winning.
- **Futureshock**: A computer virus spreads globally, causing massive financial and logistical problems. Fortunes are erased and identities destroyed as it wipes entire data banks clean.
- **The Lazarus Effect**: A new medical technology offers prolonged life, but only for the ultra-wealthy. This inequality creates social unrest, only worsened when the dark truth behind this advance is revealed.

CONFLICTS WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

In *conflicts with the supernatural*, the characters struggle against entities and paranormal phenomena. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, these conflicts include confronting the Illusion and all aspects thereof, such as the Higher Powers and their minions. These conflicts can be external or internal in nature, or possibly a combination of both.

Internal conflicts usually involve the PCs' supernatural Dark Secrets and Disadvantages, as well as their personal interactions with the Illusion. They may endure mental and physical transformations under supernatural influences. They may be unwilling to accept their destiny, denying who they are or who they could become.

External conflicts involve the supernatural world acting upon the PCs, such as monsters, arcane objects and locations, and the Higher Powers. Although the instigating forces may act directly or indirectly against the PCs, their actions must affect the PCs' lives in some profound way. For this reason, the GM should notate the prevalent Principles driving the narrative, as they'll affect PCs' interactions with the setting and NPCs.

- **The Ascension**: The PC's family strives to conjure an avatar of Archon Malkuth in Elysium. He can stop his family or join them in their apocalyptic purpose. Soon, he realize his flesh shall become Malkuth's vessel.
- **Endless Hunt**: The PC has been marked. Now, he is hounded by an inexhaustible group of wolvens, eager to capture and consume the character. The PC must cure his curse or appease the creatures.
- **The Wall-less Prison**: The PC's body has begun transforming into something inhuman. Unless he discover the source of this metamorphosis, he'll soon be entrapped within his traitorous body.
- **Bad Dreams**: The PC suffers from troubling visions and ceaseless nightmares. He discover these prophetic messages originating from his splintered soul, locked away in Limbo, seeking release.
- **The Splintered Path**: Strange disappearances increase around an abandoned courtyard, tucked away behind the PCs' apartment building. Under the right conditions, people can fall through the cracked pavement and emerge in Metropolis. Someone close to the PC succumbs to this phenomena.

THE SPIRAL OF HORROR

The Spiral of Horror is a method where the GM takes themes and story elements that have been established and incorporates them to generate momentum in the very fabric of horror. Where the GM manipulates the elements, expands upon them, and allows their colors to slowly spread out like paint on wet paper, accenting more of the story and the characters within.

The method in itself is simple. There are three levels where the horror in any story may take place: *World*, *Surrounding*, and *Internal*.

- **World**: Represents events within the global setting, ranging from the PC's country to worldwide.
- **Surrounding**: Represents events within the PC's proximity, including friends, family, and neighbors, as well as their local area.
- **Internal**: Represents events within the PC themselves, such as emotions, memories, and thoughts.

When combined, these three narrative levels represent the *layers of horror*, reflecting how the concepts affect the PCs and the overall setting. This allows the GM to guide the conversation from personalized horrors to far-reaching terrors – and then back again. The **Spiral of Horror** connects these three layers in a single, unbroken, line. The elements of horror you introduce into the story are defined by, among other things, the player character's Disadvantages, Dark Secrets and Enemies.

These elements are placed in these three layers. And during play, between the sessions, you will start moving them to new layers. Creating a sensation of tension and dread as the players experience how the horrors are either creeping nearer or spreading outwards. This can be done as the story progresses, or as the PC's **Stability** dwindles and his insight into the Illusion increases.

The Spiral may move from inside to the outside, such as when the PC's mental and spiritual horrors spill out and distort the world around him. In contrast, they can move from the outside to the inside, such as when something universal and timeless from beyond the veil seeps inside the PC's personal existence, slowly reshaping his surroundings and self.

Example of an inside-out spiral:

*Arthur suffers from horrible nightmares. He dreams of a decaying and rotting city with pale shapes staring at him from hollowed buildings. At the story's beginning, this experience is purely **Internal**, i.e., nightmares that offer him little rest. As the campaign progresses, the GM directs this element of horror outward from him, so it becomes both **Internal** and in his **Surroundings**. Soon, the wallpapers in his home are stained by water leaks, smells of decay linger, pale shapes lurk around him, and sometimes he hears someone pulling at the front door handle in the middle of the night. Towards the campaign's resolution, the GM finally moves these nightmares into the **World** as well. Arthur's entire world becomes rotten, decayed, and its inhabitants fade away, resembling pale, hollow shapes. The GM removes the nightmares as an **Internal** element of horror, and infuses them into the setting's **Surroundings** and **World**. Arthur's nightmares have become the setting's reality.*

Example of an outside-in spiral:

In a story focused on Death Angel Golab's attempt to incarnate itself in Los Angeles, the GM introduces its influence – and its Principle Torment – on the World layer through news reports and Internet traffic. They document an upsurge of crimes and domestic violence, featuring incidents of such sadism and sensationalism that they shock the nation. Morning shows and YouTubers debate if is the political climate, video games, or society's decline of faith that has led to these atrocities. As the campaign progresses, the GM pulls the Death Angel's influence closer to the PCs' Surroundings. Now, it is not just the World that has gone crazy, it intrudes upon their personal lives. A PC's partner becomes abusive and sadistic, while another PC witnesses gangers hold down and torture a homeless woman. Finally, the GM moves the influence into their Internal level, so the PCs are mentally and emotionally affected by the Death Angel's Principle.

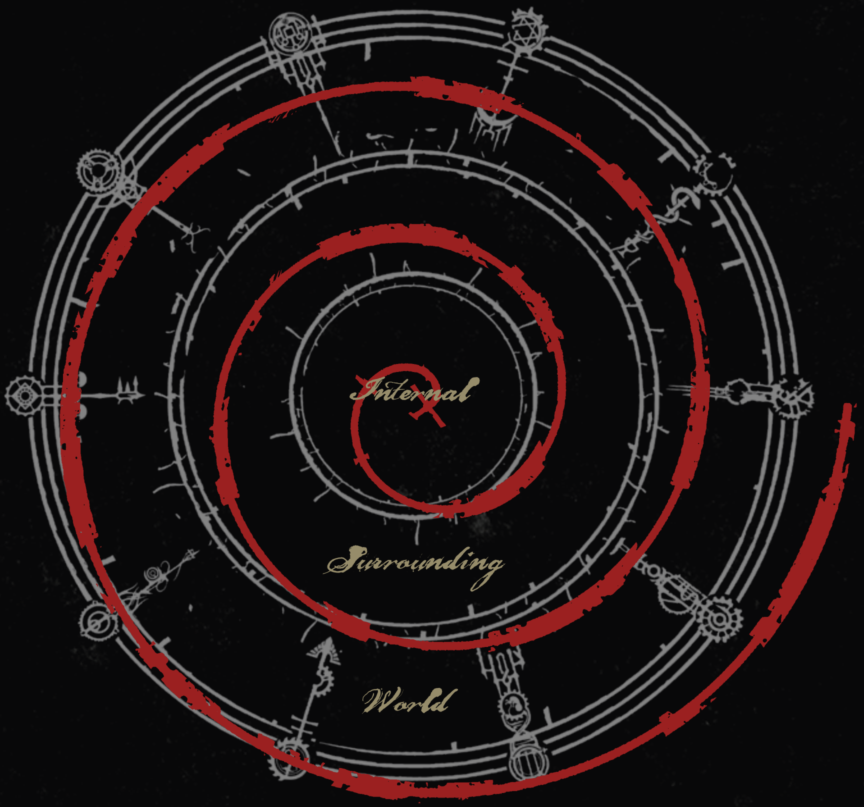
In *Book Two: Atmosphere*, we explore various genres of horror, discussing their different aspects and purposes in detail. Each of these concepts are accompanied by potential story threads, presented on the three narrative levels: *World*, *Surrounding*, and *Internal*.

THE CONVERSATION

The conversation serves as the game's framework for the group's collaborative storytelling process. It provides the GM and players with game guidelines for roleplaying, while still allowing the narrative to progress organically. Much like cinematic and literary stories, the conversation revolves around the PCs' interactions during interconnected scenes, which can take place over different time frames – be they moments, hours, or even days. As each scene concludes, the conversation advances – scene by scene – until the story reaches its appropriate narrative resolution. However, this does not mean that PCs' actions are fully completed or even successful, only that the narrative progresses logically.

Most importantly, successful conversations require the full attention and participation of everyone at the game table. To that end, the GM must offer ample opportunities for each player to participate in the conversation and provide details each can build upon. They can accomplish this by creating situations that inspire the players to ask questions, engaging them in the narrative, and providing them options. In turn, by asking the players questions, the GM gains additional information to expand and hone the storyline. They can also employ the materials they've prepared for the scenario and materials generated during downtime (p. 62).

Although the conversation's freeform presentation can be liberating, it can also be intimidating for GMs accustomed to more structured formats. By its nature, the conversation places tremendous burden on the GM to be reactive and responsive to each player. Similarly, the GM never rolls dice to determine how events play out in-game. Instead, she interpret the results of the players' actions and Moves and relay those



The Spiral of Horror

consequences narratively – usually through GM Moves (p. 33). For ease, when guiding the conversation, the GM should ask the following four questions, listed in order of importance:

- What best fulfills the **Agendas**?
- What best represents the **Principles**?
- What best defines the **fiction**?
- What do the rules require?

In some instances, strictly adhering to this structure can become confusing or make no logical sense. When this occurs, the GM can advance the narrative in any fashion that best serves the story itself. The conversation's ultimate purpose is to reveal the best story possible – one told by GM and players alike.

The Agendas

No structure works without strong foundations. For *KULT: Divinity Lost*, those foundations are built upon three Agendas (*KDL*, p. 145), which serve as the GM's primary goals while guiding the conversation. In turn, the GM draws upon these concepts as they adhere to the game's Principles, construct their collaborative fiction, and adjudicate the rules, such as Moves. Whenever the GM needs to fulfill one of their roles, she should initially look to the Agendas for guidance.

The Agendas can deeply affect the conversation of individual games, altering the collaborative storytelling process. However, the Agendas are more conducive to specific narratives and are incompatible with others. Depending on the group's desire and needs, the GM may wish to focus on only specific Agendas and/or even create their own to better reflect the stories they want to tell (see p. 25).

TEAR BACK THE ILLUSION TO REVEAL THE TRUE REALITY BEHIND IT

At its heart, *KULT: Divinity Lost* is a game about self-discovery, as seen through the lens of horror. Denied their divinity, the PCs remain imprisoned within the false world of Elysium, unaware of the vast and terrible reality around them. Yet, through their personal traumas, they gain an uneasy awareness, instinctively recognizing the *wrongness* of their world. All PCs yearns for something they do not understand, seeking enlightenment in their own troubled way. However, their greatest obstacle to achieving this true self-awareness is the Illusion.

As each story progresses, the GM slowly peels the scales from their eyes, revealing the terrible truths lurking beyond their imposed blindness. This can be achieved through exploring the characters' personal torments, such as Dark Secrets and Disadvantages, and allowing them to learn more about themselves. They can also introduce more overt encounters with the supernatural, shattering the Illusion to expose the nightmarish wonders awaiting them on the other side. By the narrative's resolution, the PCs should question their world and perception of Reality.

That said, the GM shouldn't divulge the Illusion's terrors too readily or without purpose. Revealing too much information

– or revealing it too early – can be counterproductive to the conversation. In doing so, the PCs' journey of self-discovery loses importance and significance. Furthermore, it deprives the narrative of mystery and diminishes the players' feelings of disquiet and dread. This Agenda should help fulfill the *Horror Contract*, not rob the story of its terrifying potential.

When revealing the True Reality, the GM should consider the Illusion's pervasive influence over the world and humanity. She must also consider how it simultaneously exists on two distinct, yet unified, levels – the external and the internal. The best ***KULT*** stories explore both of these metaphysical and spiritual levels, which are discussed more in-depth in ***Of Fears Unknown*** (p. 152).

The External Illusion

The *external* Illusion separates the PCs from the physical reality and defines how they experience the world around them. Furthermore, it cloaks them from those entities and forces unfettered by the Illusion. Thus, the jail serves as the PCs' prison and sanctuary, both binding and protecting them. When the GM ***Tears back the Illusion***, she's returning the world – and everything within it – back to its purest state. As such, when fulfilling this Agenda, she must consider the true nature of every element of reality, i.e., NPCs, locations, creatures, objects, etc. Also, for maximum effect, she should employ every sense when describing the True Reality – sound, smell, taste, touch, and sight.

Due to reality's surreal nature, the GM need not be constrained by normal logic or spatial physics, allowing her to present entirely unique experiences in even mundane locations. Beyond the Illusion, anywhere and anything could be part of the various Realms. A greasy diner could be an arboretum in Metropolis. A skyscraper's roof could be the depths of Inferno. The crouched beggar could be an imposing angel, while an abandoned car could be an undead abomination. The GM can reshape Reality into whatever she desire, plunging the PCs into impossible worlds and gruesome horrors.

- Dust motes swirl in the sunlight streaming through cracks in the wall. Yet, night fell hours ago, the sun long set. Thick, purple vines spread over the wallpaper and plaster, trying to widen the hole from the other side.
- Stained posters cling to the brick walls, arranged in arcane patterns that hurt your head. Their propaganda images and mottos grow increasingly bizarre and offensive, hanging from the public building like loose skin.
- The humming street cleaner crawls toward you on insectile limbs, his wiry frame an unnatural meshing of metal and chitin. Tendrils slather over the pavement, ceaselessly feeding upon masses of clotted blood, bile, and rotted meat.
- A truck rumbles out of the alley, nearly plowing over you, belching acrid exhaust. You see malformed faces staring out from behind the wooden slats of its bed. Helpless and terrified, they plea for your help, reaching out with bloodied hands.
- Old hospital beds have been arranged in perfect rows along the park's pathway. Their soiled mattresses writhe with vermin, the air around them musty and stale. Although most are empty, one bed contains someone wrapped in discolored sheets. As you approach, the figure begins squirming.

The Internal Illusion

The *internal* Illusion is far more personal and subtle. The PCs were once part of the True Reality, divine entities with inglorious pasts and horrific appetites. As reality is revealed, the PCs must face the darkest truth: the most terrifying monsters are who they once were. These malignant pasts defined them, soured their spirit with forgotten sins. Once removed, the internal Illusion deprives them of their comforting denials and ignorance, exposing their hidden soul.

When the GM ***Tears back the Illusion***, she should consider each PC's horrible histories and secrets. These may be intimately tied to their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages; psychic stains that have followed them through repeated incarnations. They can personalize these fearful revelations, connecting them to the current narrative, as well as create entirely new stories. Due to the Illusion's distortion of Time and Space, these images and memories may also originate from the past, present, and future. The divine soul is eternal, its influence resonating beyond the corporeal, offering the GM endless opportunities.

- As you approach the broken tombstone, your guts tighten and churn. You remember its shape; the angelic figure wears your face. Your old face. The face the Hollow One stole from you. Pain, raw and wet, washes over you, feeling the meat and muscle pulling away.
- Your hand instinctively trails over the wall, finding the hidden hole. With a gentle pull, the brick pulls away to reveal darkness beyond. Something glints deep inside. You put it there, yet you can't remember what it is.
- The faces around you are unfamiliar – masks of false smiles and devious eyes. They claim they're your family, but you only remember another one. Your loving spouse, your fair-haired child. Where have they gone?
- The stink of smoke and horse shit flood your head. Your knees buckle, as the ground shifts into freshly churned mud. The modern buildings regress and reform into an endless row of old tenements. You lived and died in this squalor, choking on your blood. A familiar, cruel voice calls your name.
- Your flesh aches with desire, every nerve aflame with need. You remember the carpet of bodies beneath you, supple and yielded, tamed by your cruel will. Gender and identity meshed indivisibly; mouths, orifices, and limbs eager to please. How could you have forsaken these pleasures for the banality of this world?

KEEP THE PCS ON EDGE, ONLY ALLOWING THEM MOMENTS OF RESPITE

Tied to the *Horror Contract*, this Agenda inspires the GM to create unsettling encounters that test the PCs' mental and physical endurance. Throughout each narrative, they endure personal hardships and horrors, both external and internal. These terrifying experiences can take numerous forms and work on different emotional levels, as discussed in ***Hierarchy of Horror*** (p. 35). As the story progresses, these brushes with the horrific instill the PCs – and players – with fear and mistrust.

However, the GM should not limit herself to introducing fearful elements into her stories. ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** narratives also involve personal drama and explore the boundaries of morality. To this end, the GM should place the PCs in uncomfortable situations, forcing the players to make impossible choices for their characters. As their inner resolve and personal beliefs are tested, the PCs' masks are stripped away, revealing the true face beneath. The GM can ask the players tough questions, allowing them to contribute to their PC's emotional journey.

In contrast, the Agenda's secondary aspect is to allow the PCs moments of respite. As discussed in the ***Tension/Release Cycle*** (p. 39), the GM must maintain this narrative ebb and flow to avoid player anxiety transforming into frustration. This becomes vital when introducing supernatural and horrific elements into the story, as they can lose their effect over time (see ***Hierarchy of Horror***, p. 35).

Most importantly, the GM needs to enact this Agenda while still *Being a Fan of the PCs* (***KDL***, p. 147). The Agenda must not be presented in an adversarial manner, the antithesis of collaborative storytelling. While the PCs should be tested to their limits, their stories must be handled with fairness and narrative logic.

- After being pursued by hooded figures, the PC hides away in his apartment. As the night stretches toward dawn, he hear an incessant knocking – at an *interior* door.
- The PC meets with their contact in an old pub. However, the contact refuses to provide him information unless they share a drink. A recovering alcoholic, the PC must weigh his **Drug Addiction** against gaining the needed information.
- The PC hears music playing somewhere in the parking garage; an old tune they vaguely recall from his troubled past. He soon discover the sound coming from an empty car, still running, and its windows rolled down. The trunk is lifted, but he can't see its contents without getting closer.
- The lights go out in the room, plunging the PCs into darkness. Although he was alone seconds before, someone giggles nearby. "Are you ready to start?"
- Across the street, the homeless man is being pushed into an unmarked van. His attackers wear uniforms with odd markings, while their faces are cubist nightmares. Despite the crowded streets, no one appears to notice or care.

LET THE PCS' ACTIONS MAKE AN IMPACT, REGARDLESS OF CONSEQUENCES

Although ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** explores transcendent terrors, the PCs and their experiences remain the game's narrative focus. As such, the PCs' actions must have some significant effect on their world, even if only within their personal microcosm. For good or ill, their choices should resonate throughout the story, affecting its various elements and changing its narrative progression, accordingly. Even when the PCs fail at their actions, the consequences thereof should have weight and importance, leading to new storytelling opportunities. Depending on the situation, certain actions may resonate throughout the narrative; their implications manifesting long after the initial event. And, ultimately, the consequences can be either positive or negative, as long as the resolution makes sense to the story.

Throughout each story, the GM acts as the PCs' advocate and supporter. Even when running pregenerated scenarios, she should never refuse the players' requests outright. Instead, she can find new ways of incorporating these suggestions into the current storyline, building upon the consequences, rather creating narrative roadblocks. Continually encourage player participation by inspiring roleplaying opportunities unique to each PC. If they wish to approach the story differently, the GM can adapt by generating new hubs and links in the Intrigue Map. Again, do not focus on one PC, but include everyone at the table in the conversation process. Directly engage the quiet players and provide their PCs with opportunities to impact the story. In short, when their actions and choices actually matter, the players will care more about the game itself.

- **The Detective** protects his romantic interest, even when the authorities come looking for him. He gets beaten and dragged to the station, enduring hours of questioning. This loyalty wins over the interest's family, who lend the PC much-needed help later in the story.
- **The Occultist's** ritual doesn't go according to plan, leaving the portal to Limbo open too long. This allows an entity from beyond to possess someone close by. The creature begins committing horrible acts, and flaunting them over the PC.
- **The Seeker** uncovers corporate secrets on the stolen laptop, and releases them to the public. The resulting media storm topples the company and hinders its financial aid to the cult the PCs are trying to stop.
- **The Agent** breaks up an altercation, and accidentally kills one of the perpetrators. Unfortunately, the gang member's sibling comes looking for revenge, turning the PC's life upside down.
- **The Cursed** saves an abducted child from their literal demons, even at the risk to his own life. Later, the child's social worker approaches the PC for help with similar abduction cases. In exchange, the worker offers insight into their impending fate.

REFRAMING THE AGENDAS

The Agendas are meant to frame the conversation, serving as concrete goals for the GM. However, they may not fit into more stylized games, becoming more hindrance rather than help. A gaming group prefers quiet and psychological horror, and do not wish to reveal Reality's overt aspects. They may wish to keep tension to a minimum, instead focusing on the characters and communal roleplaying. Or, they may wish to explore darker, nihilistic themes, where the characters' actions have little or no meaning. Each of these stories would conflict with the established Agendas, creating disharmony. In other instances, the group may wish to alter the thematically key concepts of the *KULT* mythos, while drawing inspiration from certain aspects they enjoy. These major tonal shifts would require specific Agendas to guide the conversation and uphold the group's *Horror Contract*.

In these cases, the GM can personalize their Agendas, altering, removing, and/or adding them to the overall meta-narrative. Through these divergent frameworks, known as *Reflections*, the GM can develop specialized storylines and entire campaigns, ranging from uncanny horrors to splatterpunk apocalypses. Communally, the group draws thematic inspiration from their *Horror Contract* and agrees upon Agendas that best reflect its core tenants. Once the GM and players consent to these changes, they are recorded on the *Horror Contract*.

Note: As with standard Agendas, these revisions are not immutable rules – only guidelines for the best game possible. Also, when designing new Reflections, the GM must consider which – if any – Principles will be affected by these narrative changes (p. 28).

Book Three: Reflections (p. 232) provides different new Agendas to incorporate into current campaigns and scenarios. These Reflections represent common horror genres, as well as variations thereof. However, they are in no way the only themes possible, serving only as inspiration. Gaming groups are free to adapt and combine these alternative Agendas to create their perfect version of ***KULT: Divinity Lost***.

The Principles

While the Agendas represent the conversation's ultimate goal, the *Principles* serve as the pathways for reaching that narrative conclusion. They serve as guidelines for employing GM Moves and maintaining the conversation's natural progression from scene to scene. Most importantly, the Principles help the GM develop narrative elements within the story, thus promoting the game's overall fiction. If the Agendas are the conversation's foundation, the Principles are its framework, allowing the GM to personalize each gaming experience.

THE TRINITY

Above all others, three Principles need the GM's utmost attention throughout each session, as they inherently connect the players to the conversation. These are:

- Address the Characters, Not the Players.
- Ask Questions and Build on the Answers.
- Be a Fan of the Player Characters.

By *Addressing the Characters, Not the Players*, the GM invests the players in the game-space, allowing them to connect more deeply with their PCs and the narrative. In turn, this personalized experience naturally encourages them to engage more freely in the conversation. Encourage the players to speak in the first-person when their character takes an action or they interact with each other and the NPCs. This investiture is important for ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** stories, which focus heavily on personalized horror. The more the player relates to these terrifying experiences, the more impactful the narrative becomes and the less likely they'll be distracted by outside influences.

Similarly, by *Asking Questions and Building on the Answers*, the GM connects the players to the conversation and encourages collaborative storytelling. In most cases, the GM asks questions spontaneously throughout each scene, usually as the result of player Moves, encountering Threats, and general roleplaying. These questions may be used to inspire new narratives or simply clarify specific situations. However, the GM can also prepare her questions during downtime, using them to expand upon established narratives and expand the fiction. This permits the GM to construct important story elements, as well as allow the players to fill in narrative gaps with their own impressions. This feeds the conversation and sets up triggers for new bombs, Dramatic Hooks, and Reactions (see ***Foundations of Dread***, p. 46).

Finally, above all else, the GM must *Be a Fan of the PCs*. Although this Principle may appear self-evident, this may be an issue for GMs and players accustomed to some traditionalized RPGs. Due to their format and mechanics, these games can create uneven power-dynamics, and even adversarial relationships. Instead, GMs should encourage collaborative storytelling and be open to the players' suggestions and ideas, rather than restricting them to certain narrative paths. If the potential results benefit the story, allow them to work outside the system's mechanical confines. Even if the player fails at their rolls, do not punish them and/or close off potential story paths completely. Instead, be their fan, and encourage new challenges and opportunities (see ***Failing Forward,*** p. 33). In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the GM's role is not to torment the players, but allow their characters to experience personal horrors in a logical, intriguing, and – ultimately – enjoyable fashion.

ENCOURAGE FANTASTICAL REALISM

Outside the PCs, the GM represents everyone and everything within the game world, from the mundane to the fantastical. Although ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** contains arcane wonders and nightmarish terrors, the world itself must be presented logically and realistically. Otherwise, the conversation will weaken the impact of its narratives and diminishing its horrors to cheap caricatures.

As such, the GM must *Assign Motivations to All Her NPCs* and *Give Her Creatures Their Own Internal Logic* to establish and maintain a believable and compelling story. By providing them goals, personalities, faults, and uncertainties, the players become more invested in them – as do the PCs. Furthermore, they further establish the setting itself, adding credence to its realism. Through collaborative storytelling, the players can also contribute to the process. When the NPCs and creatures feel real to them, their sense of connection and drama deepen. These Principles are discussed at length in ***Flesh & Soul*** (p. 76) and ***Arcana & Apparitions*** (p. 132).

Although not an established Principle, the GM should also *Bring Important Locations to Life*. As above, developed locations play an important role in establishing believable settings and stories. They are the stage upon which the narrative plays out, accenting the story elements. Give the locations something memorable and unique for the players to remember and build upon. Allow them to describe important locations, asking questions, and expanding upon them. This process is explained fully in ***The Pillars of the False Heaven*** (p. 106).

INSPIRE UNCERTAINTIES IN YOUR DESCRIPTIONS

By framing the scene properly, the GM can introduce uncertainties and doubts in the players' minds. The GM can leave story elements ambiguous or cloaked, keeping the focus off them until the right moment to achieve the maximum, narrative effect. This is particularly useful in upholding the Principles *Insinuate the Supernatural* and *Make Your Moves, But Use the Fiction to Disguise Why*. Give the players fleeting glimpses of the world and its horrors, effectively blurring the camera and keeping the truth just out of frame. Furthermore, by inspiring uncertainty, the GM allows the players to fill in the gaps themselves, shaping their own personal terrors. Play upon their personal fears and ideas, reshaping your Moves to meet their expectations – as usually, their ideas will be far, far worse. This creates the continual sensation of unease and distrust, adding additional tension to the conversation (see ***Hierarchy of Horror***, p. 35).

- The man you are trailing suddenly pauses in a doorway. With their back to you, they examine something in their coat. Is it their phone? Their wallet? Or, worse, maybe they're armed.
- Your virtual assistant chimes for no apparent reason. A sinister static rises from its speaker, as if the audio connected to an empty channel. You'd swear you can hear breathing on the other end. Then it chimes again. The static is gone.
- Something rests in the branches outside your window, vaguely outlined by the street lamp. The syrupy shadows obscure its true form. It could be an old trash bag or cluster of leaves and twigs. Are those eyes or just a reflection?
- Something thumps loudly behind you. You turn to find a book on the floor; apparently having fallen from its shelf. From its large size, it seems unlikely to have fallen on its own.
- Even with the bright daylight streaming in behind you, the apartment remains eerily dark. You can make out the living room furniture. A door hangs open beyond; the kitchen, perhaps? You feel an uneasy sensation that someone is looking back at you from that room.

THE WORLD LENSES

Although the GM normally reveal the game world through roleplaying, she can also use the Principles to create mind pictures for the players, effectively allowing them to visualize the scene's important elements. Much as a cinematographer might, she compose the conversation through artistic techniques such as color, filters, focus, and framing. In effect, the Principles become lenses with which to capture this imagery and encourage players to contribute to the collaborative storytelling process.

The Establishing Shot

The GM should *Think Beyond the Scene from Time to Time* and establish narrative elements before revealing their true significance to the current storyline. Much like a camera tracking through the scene, the GM briefly focuses on background NPCs, locations, and events, fleshing them out over time. This signifies their relevance to the characters, as well as the players. Narrative elements will provide more emotional impact when they reappear later in the story. Indeed, the players may begin making their own conclusions, thus heightening their involvement in the conversation. However, as with Chekhov's Gun, narrative elements need to be important to the story as a whole.

Familiar objects also establish connections and history, which adds context and texture to the game setting. When players feel invested in their surroundings, they'll be inspired to share their own narrative elements and create relationships. This technique also plays heavily into *environmental storytelling* (p. 107) by establishing the story's theme and tone. In time, the GM and players may develop these plot points into hubs and links on the Intrigue Map. Even seemingly mundane plot points may blossom into intricate narratives.

- The PC's work colleague frequently talks about his affection for plants and reality television. In particular, he's excited about his budding online relationship with 'The One.' Later, he's found to have committed suicide despite the PC knowing this is completely out of character.
- The PCs hear about a hate group committing random acts of vandalism and violence. They deal drugs out of their biker bar on the city's outskirts, but are tolerated by the police for some reason. Later, one of the PC's Relations is targeted by their abuse.
- The PC's favorite coffee shop is an old hole-in-the-wall owned by an eclectic woman who is knowledgeable in art history and science. The shop is rumored to be haunted, due to the 'portal' in the basement. One night, an arsonist destroy the building and the owner goes missing.
- A homeless person regularly sleeps in the PC's parking garage. They are peaceful, polite, and frequently draw complex chalk paintings. Later, when the PC is attacked by an entity, they save him using some bizarre magic.

The Close-Up Shots

In cinematography, the *close-up shot* focuses on one aspect of the narrative, drawing the audience's attention to it. Similarly, the GM can focus the conversation by accentuating important story elements. These close-up shots also encourage the players to introduce details, allowing the GM to *Ask Questions and Build on the Answers.* This technique is particularly helpful when *Insinuating the Supernatural*, so the horrific elements are used to their best effect. An effective way for emphasizing specific details is by presenting them through *contradictions*, *contrasts*, and *extremes.*

Through Contradictions, the GM creates compelling dynamics between the narrative element's exterior appearance and internal nature; i.e., what it appears to be and what it *truly is*. This technique benefits the Principles *Assign Motivations to All Your NPCs* and *Give Your Creatures Their Own Internal Logic* by inspiring complex and memorable personalities. When the GM *Insinuates the Supernatural*, they can further reveal the Illusion's power and importance, as it creates contradictions by its very essence, masking the horrible truth beneath.

Similarly, Contrasting qualities draw attention to two or more narrative elements by juxtaposing them against one another. They reveal each element's inner nature, focusing the players on their differences. Indeed, contrasts are particularly useful when they oppose the PCs' personalities, as it automatically creates drama and tension. In turn, this reveals each of their inner motivations, as the PCs innately respond. Contrasts can also play an integral role in revealing the story's themes, adding nuance to its narrative elements.

Finally, Extremes grab the player's attention by sheer force, assailing them with vibrant and violent imagery. These narrative elements assault the PCs' senses and test their beliefs and morality by exposing the world's indifferent nature. Extremes can be particularly useful in creating revulsion, as discussed in ***Hierarchy of Horror*** (p. 35). Although shocking and effective for gaining attention, extremes should be used in moderation, as they can quickly lose their effect.

- **[Contradiction]** The toothless woman shivers in her cardboard hovel, swaddled in rags and newspaper. Yet, despite the layers of filth and grime over her ancient body, you notice her immaculate hands. They're clean and well-groomed; her glossy fingernails are painted in the current fashion.
- **[Contradiction]** Sunlight pours into the house, gleaming off every polished surface. Its furnishings and decor are arranged in perfect order, stylized to reveal the owner's importance. Yet, shadows coagulate in every sharp corner, robbing the rooms of any warmth.
- **[Contrast]** Despite his gallows humor and relentless pessimism, the police contact maintains an overly positive attitude, seeking to improve himself and the world around him. Nothing phases him, even when he wades through humanity's filth.
- **[Contrast]** Your contact, a fastidious researcher, sits at the back of a raucous bar. Despite days of quiet solitude at the university's library, she seems more at peace with the pounding psytrance beat and human noise.
- **[Extreme]** Blood splatters the woman's mask, heightening its absurd colorations. A milky eye stares out from the ragged hole, framed by crisped skin. She lurches forward in jerky motions, waving the rusted hook back and forth.
- **[Extreme]** You smell the kitchen before reaching it. The humid air reeks of fermentation and rotted meat. The stink becomes a choking wall, filling your mouth with its foulness. Your friend leans against the door, overwhelmed by an attack of dry heaves.

CREATING NEW PATHWAYS

Horror stories are divergent in themes and tone, offering numerous approaches to telling their terrifying narratives. As with Agendas, the GM can add and alter Principles to best fit their vision of ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** and unique *Horror Contract*. This can also be done by eliminating incompatible Principles, although, the GM should be careful if/when these changes affect the game's established mythos.

When developing new Principles, the GM must consider its ultimate purpose and effect on the conversation. As always, this must be a collaborative effort with the players, usually revolving around the established *Horror Contract*. Ask the players questions about what tones and themes they wish to explore, and what inspirations they wish to draw from. Do they want quiet horror, action horror, eroticism and sexual

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

When creating the 'establishing shots,' the GM may wish to utilize player handouts. These props can consist of photographs of the setting and important NPCs, as well as mundane items such as adverts, city maps, newspaper clips, blog/emails, etc. These tactile elements help connect the players to their world, inspiring them to build upon and become part of it. The GM can also weave significant plot points into the handout materials, such as hiding clues in plain sight, aiding the players' direct involvement in the story's progression.

themes, extreme horror, etc.? Do they want the supernatural aspects more pronounced or subtle? What Principles might affect and/or inspire the style of roleplay they desire? Take this information and develop Principles to encourage and frame the game toward these narrative desires.

New, genre-specific Principles are featured throughout *Book Three: Reflections* (p. 232). The GM is free to incorporate these revised Principles into her personalized conversation, or use them for inspiration.

Example: *Inspired by paranormal romance and urban fantasy, the game group wants to explore more relationship-focused stories. Together, the GM and players add two Principles, Connect the characters to the supernatural world and Relationships drive the narrative. The first Principle requires the PCs and major NPCs to all have personal connections to the supernatural world, such as through cults, organizations, etc. These connections constantly pressure them, adding additional conflicts and tension. The second Principle places the narrative focus on intimate relationships, where the characters' interactions have major consequences to their personal lives. Because of this narrative shift, the standard Principle, Insinuate the Supernatural, becomes counterproductive and is removed, as the supernatural is always present in the character's lives.*

The Fiction

In collaborative storytelling, the shared narratives aren't expressed through bland game-terms, such as attributes and mechanics. Nor are the stories limited to a singular person's framework and perceptions. Instead, each narrator weaves their personal vision into the story, describing its characters and setting through their shared language. In turn, the storytellers' combined creativity and imagination create something truly unique.

Similarly, in *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the fiction serves as the game's language, helping the GM and players narratively define and describe the conversation. Unlike more traditional games, the game mechanics should act as the *unseen* foundation for building story structures, rather than defining them through terminology. In this fashion, concepts such as Attributes, Moves, Rolls, and resolutions become part of the shared story, rather than separate – and sterile – definitions.

In particular, two Principles inspire this collaborative process in establishing the fiction. Firstly, *Make Your Moves, But Use the Fiction to Disguise Why* requires the GM to narratively justify the game's mechanical aspects and empathize plot progression over rules. Secondly, by *Making Your Moves, But Describe Them in the Fiction*, the GM presents their Moves as story elements, organically weaving them into the scene. In this manner, the GM narratively empowers the conversation, transforms game mechanics into plot elements, and promotes player investment by personalizing the story to the group.

EMPOWERING THE CONVERSATION

The fiction empowers the conversation by narratively describing game mechanics, such as Advantages, Attributes, Disadvantages, and unique Moves. As per the Principles discussed above, whenever possible, the GM (and/or players) should find some narrative explanation to weave the mechanics into the overall story. This technique can become particularly important during rule-heavy moments, such as combat resolution, which inherently disrupt the game's progression. Instead, the group frames these moments within the conversation, resolving their roles based on what's best for the story, not the rules. This allows the fiction to strip away and minimize the game's mechanical distractions, and maintain its atmosphere and sense of realism.

While ***Engaging in Combat***, the player rolls a success with complications. Rather than focus on the back-and-forth of combat resolution, the GM ***Offers Them an Opportunity With a Cost***. Together, they describe how the PC is thrown into a window, smashing it. Being throttled, the PC desperately grabs a shard of glass and thrusts it into his assailant's throat. Mortally wounded, the attacker releases their grip, collapsing. The PC recovers, but his hand is now slashed to bloody ribbons by the improvised weapon. He quickly wrap it up and down some pain killers, controlling the bleeding… for now [successful ***Endure Injury***].

The fiction's influence can – and should – resonate well beyond any specific encounter, scene, or scenario. In this way, game mechanics and Moves evolve from simple resolutions into becoming narrative elements. The game group further develops their conversation's canon and its underlying storylines, personalizing the game world. When properly emphasized, the fiction makes the story more realistic and emotional, thus encouraging collaborative storytelling on all levels. As such, the GM and players should continually record any additions to the overall fiction, as this will allow them to maintain continuity.

Due to their cult's nature, the GM and player agree the visions provided by the PC's Cult Leader Advantage reveal themselves as intricate tattoos on the PC's flesh. Mechanically, nothing changes when the player rolls the Advantage. Fictionally, this creates an intricate relationship with the cult members, who must read and interpret the divine messages. This also opens new narrative threads for later in the game, especially on failed rolls.

The first session (*KDL*, p. 172) is an excellent opportunity for establishing the fiction. The GM should encourage the players to narratively explain their characters' Attributes and qualities, drawing from the answers they provide. This provides opportunities for the players to explore the PCs' lives, both on the physical and emotional level, and better establishes their connections to the game world. The fiction can also introduce narrative elements outside the mechanic's confines, adding background and story details.

- **Attribute [Violence]**: Having grown up on the streets, ***The Descendant*** quickly learned how to fight dirty and use improvised weapons. He also suffered for this rough upbringing, and are missing part of his left ear. This injury brings him respect and fear in certain circles.
- **Advantage [Hacker]**: ***The Seeker's*** computer skills are only matched by his obsession for technology. He continually collect old hardware, outdated software, bits of junk, and tech manuals from stores and garage sales. At any given moment, his pockets are lined with cords, wires, small peripherals, and disks.
- **Disadvantage [*Owned*]**: ***The Doll*** may have escaped his former life, but traumas from that existence still remain. He flinch instinctively at loud noises, and wear frumpy clothing whenever possible. He's constantly on guard, as if his former lover may intrude upon his life at any moment.
- **Dark Secret [*Visitation*]**: ***The Ronin*** is continually harassed by an inhuman creature. It wears the face of his former victims, whispering accusations and hatred, and pushing the character to kill himself to repent. Before it appears, there is the smell of cinnamon.
- **Move [*Avoid Harm*]**: ***The Agent*** excelled in his personal defense training, and even participated in martial arts tournaments. This hardened his body and heightened his reflexes. He still maintain contact with his former dojo.

MOVING BEYOND THE RULES

Mechanically, the GM Moves are designed to help frame the conversation and accent the fiction in each scene. As discussed above, the Principle *Make Your Moves, But Use the Fiction to Disguise Them* frees the GM from openly declaring the soft/hard Moves being used. This philosophy can be extended to other game mechanics, such as the player Moves, expressing them through the fiction; i.e., not everything *needs* to be rolled for. Indeed, employing mechanics for more common-sense Moves may detract for the story, diminishing player immersion. By deemphasizing the rules, the more naturalistic and engaging the storytelling experience can become.

The PCs pursue the vagrant into an old car park, temporarily losing sight of them. Mechanically, the players should each roll ***Observe a Situation***, and then ask questions accordingly. However, this would break immersion and slow the scene down. Instead, the GM focuses on the fiction, revealing that one PC used to hide here, and knows the squatters have an escape route on the lower level. In character, the player announces this to the group, and together they decide to head toward the hidden exit.

The GM also has latitude on their Moves' severity and how they're reflected in game. Normally, soft Moves reveal impending consequences and threats to the characters. However, the GM can always use these Moves to empower the conversation, invoking atmosphere and mood, as well as providing additional information to the players. The GM can draw inspiration from ***Book Two: Atmosphere*** when establishing her fiction.

The PCs explore a structure designed with non-Euclidean geometry. There's no specific GM Move that represents this, as there are no true consequences or threats, nor does walking down the hallway require the standard question, "What Do You Do?" Instead, the GM places story over rules and focuses on the fiction: *The hallway's perspectives are all wrong. Impossible angles cut the air, blending into one another until you can't tell what is ceiling or floor or wall.*

Hard Moves can also be handled in this fashion. Typically, hard Moves result in dire consequences, such as Injury or **Stability** loss. However, they can be taken even further, enhancing the conversation and overall story. For example, the PCs may be forced to make impossible choices or watch their loved ones turn against them. While these events do not *mechanically* adhere to standard GM Moves, they *fictionally* represent consequences of the PC's actions or failures, making the story more interesting.

The PCs' low **Stability** and exhaustion have opened them to outside influences. An entity begins intruding onto their consciousness, altering their perceptions. Although, *mechanically* nothing changes, *fictionally* the PCs' begins questioning their own actions and sanity. Soon, they discover presents from their invader, such as bloodied clothing stuffed in the hamper and unnatural foods in the freezer.

On the other hand, if the group prefers a more traditional, structured format, the GM may introduce additional Moves and/or alter existing ones to enhance their game-play. The conversation should always take precedence, but rules aren't set in stone, able to change as the campaign progresses. However, rule alterations must be declared and mutually agreed to prior to play. To avoid confusion, this discussion typically occurs during pregame (p. 43).

EMOTIONAL ISOLATION

When utilizing Moves, such as ***Separate Them***, the GM isn't limited to physicality, but may also employ emotional separation as well. The PCs may find their relationships disintegrating or radically transforming, leaving them isolated and helpless. Their diminished mental state may also disconnect them from others (***Decrease Stability***), driving them into existential crisis. In extreme cases, the PC may even be obscured by the Illusion, fading from conscious perception until he cease to exist in Elysium.

THE GM MOVES

Unlike more traditional RPGs, *KULT* GMs do not roll dice when resolving conflicts and other game mechanics. Instead, they communicate these resolutions through the conversation, specifically in the form of GM Moves. These represent the narrative effects of the PCs' successes and failures, affecting the overall story and pushing it in interesting directions. Ultimately, their responses affect the players' goals, characterization, and narrative understanding. As such, successfully managing conversations require the GM to remain highly reactive, intuitive, and knowledgeable throughout the game session.

The two types of GM Moves – soft and hard – also represent narrative obstacles for the PCs to overcome (***KDL***, p. 150). In short, *soft* Moves reveal potential threats and consequences, whereas *hard* Moves represent the threats and consequences themselves. However, as with other rules, GM Moves offer far more interesting opportunities for developing the fiction and expanding the conversation. Nor are GMs limited to using the Moves as written, being free to change them to accommodate different perspectives, situations, and themes. Even the slightest alteration can greatly enhance the story's emotional resonance and intensity.

Failing Forward

Intense roleplaying rarely involves continually making perfect rolls and accomplishing every goal. It is about telling compelling stories and portraying realistic characters. In literature and cinema, the most interesting narratives stem not from the character's successes, but their failures and tribulations. As they strive to overcome their troubles, their inner nature is revealed, adding drama and tension.

Unfortunately, in more traditional RPGs, failed dice rolls result in negative consequences for the PCs. In effect, these binary mechanics punish the player for making mistakes, taking creative risks, or simply having bad luck. Furthermore, repeated 'fail' states can completely derail the story, creating a negative-feedback loop, sometimes to the point where the PCs are unable to effectively continue the story. This inherently undermines narrative-based games by creating mechanical roadblocks the characters cannot overcome.

However, in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the *failure* state (a roll of **–9**) is not absolute. While the PC's actions result in negative consequences, they do not need to be unsuccessful. Instead, the GM acquires different Moves to represent these outcomes, which can occur immediately or later in the story. As such, the game mechanics promote a *failure spectrum*, which allows the GM to introduce new narrative possibilities, rather than punishing players for unlucky die rolls.

Also known as *failing forward*, the GM Moves generate minor complications and major setbacks that benefit the conversation. Although these new opportunities represent additional challenges, the players gain different avenues to advance the story. This effectively eliminates negative-feedback loops that can undermine the game. Furthermore, these new challenges allow the players to approach situations differently, adding tension and pushing the PCs out of their comfort zone.

- While handling a locked door, the player fails their ***Act Under Pressure*** roll. The GM declares the PC cannot open the lock, and they've alerted *something* inside (***Put Someone in a Bad Spot***). A creature emerges to investigate, creating a new threat for PCs to overcome. However, the door is now unlocked, allowing them to proceed afterwards.
- While coercing an NPC to acquire an illegal item, the players fail their ***Influence Other*** roll. The NPC refuses and throws them out of the night club. However, an unscrupulous lackey offers to sell the item anyway, but there are questionable strings attached (***Give the Possible Consequences and Ask***). The characters acquire what they need, but must face unpleasant consequences later in the story.
- At the beginning of the story, the player rolls **–9** on the ***Harassed*** Disadvantage, which provides the GM with 3 Hold. Rather than inflict random acts of intimidation and violence, the GM weaves the Moves into the narrative (***Use Disadvantages/Hold***). The harasser assists the story's antagonist, as they share common goals. Although this adds additional challenges for the PC, they're more invested in the story.

The GM can also adjust this failure spectrum to better reflect their *Horror Contract*. For example, in more intense or realistic stories, the GM Moves can have severe and long-lasting (possibly tragic) repercussions. In quiet horror or uncanny stories, the GM Moves can impose less dire consequences, focusing instead on strange and unnerving challenges. However, the GM must still adhere to the Principle, *Be a Fan of the PCs*. Never impose grave consequences, unless doing so would advance the narrative.

- The group's *Horror Contract* promotes psychological horror over extreme violence. While struggling against a vengeful Jackal, the player fails several ***Avoid Harm*** rolls. Suffering additional **Harm** would *realistically* kill the character. Instead, the GM has the character thrown backwards, tumbling helplessly down a hillside. He later wake up, ankle twisted and bleeding heavily. He's survived, but are now trapped and need to treat his injuries. Worse, the Jackal will likely target his loved ones next.

Promoting the Try/Fail Cycle

The most intriguing stories feature protagonists failing at their goals, dealing with the consequences, and trying again. This narrative concept is prevalent in the horror genre, where the characters continually face insurmountable threats and suffer traumatic setbacks. Their successes reveal deeper complications, while their failures unleash dire consequences. Yet, despite all this, the characters persevere, striving ever forward, until they finally achieve their ultimate goal. This victory tastes far sweeter, and the characters have grown personally, shaped by their personal struggles.

This is the essence of the *try/fail cycle* – a literary tool that prompts narrative tension through escalating challenges and fail-states. Player investment and anxiety stems from their PCs continually riding the razor's edge of success and complete failure. The GM Moves naturally encourage the try/fail cycle by introducing setbacks and complications into the narrative when players roll *partial success* **(10 – 14)** and *failures* **(–9)**. The GM can also temper successful rolls with compromises and unforeseen consequences, allowing them to reveal new threats and advance milestones. When successes are bittersweet and hard won, the players' tension is heightened and the overall story becomes more cinematic and intense.

However, the GM must utilize the try/fail cycle only to enhance the narrative, rather than to directly undermine the players' successful rolls and chosen actions. Otherwise, this storytelling technique may be mistaken as adversarial and will violate *Be a Fan of the Characters. Again*, ask questions and let the players inspire the story's progression, rather than establishing predetermined outcomes.

In the Antarctica scenario (*KDL*, p. 200), Lictor de Arnán plans to awaken the Sleeping God. To prevent this, the players need to prevent several milestones from being achieved. In short order, the PCs succeed at their ***Occult Studies*** and ***Prepared*** rolls to learn about the threat's nature, as well as the Sleeping God's location. Following their acquired map, they enter the tomb and avoid de Arnán and his minions through successful **Coolness** rolls. Finally, they utilize their ***Artifact*** and ***Divine*** Advantages to control and lull the entity back into eternal slumber. They thwarted de Arnán's plans and ended the scenario. *Technically*, this adheres to the game mechanics, but the story itself – to put it mildly – lacks any true depth or tension.

In contrast, the GM approaches the same scenario by empathizing the *try/fail cycle* for each successful roll. Through the ***Occult Studies*** roll, the PCs learn the required binding spells are located inside the cult's stronghold. They discover the map provided by their ***Prepared*** roll is flawed, as sections of the tomb have collapsed over time. This forces them into the tomb's dream version to bypass the rubble and de Arnán's minions. Upon reaching the other side, the ***Artifact*** reveals the Sleeping God's true form, but its hypnotic presence lulls the PCs' minds. When the ***Divine*** PC successfully controls it, the Sleeping God mistakes them for its mate and tries dragging them back into the Dreaming to be reunited. With each successful roll, the PCs' circumstances become worse, but each setback adds to the tension, making for a better story.

Reframing the Conversation

Once the GM feels comfortable using her hard and soft Moves in the conversation, she shouldn't restrict herself to asking the standardized question, "*What do you do?*" As useful as this mechanic is, it ultimately limits the players' responses, and thus, reduces the opportunities for developing new and compelling narratives. This standard inquiry can also inhibit chances for roleplaying and self-reflection by trapping the GM and players inside an action/reaction cycle.

Instead, the GM can alternate her line of inquiry, asking questions such as *Who*, *Where*, *When*, *Why*, *How*, and variants of *What*? These are focused on different aspects of the ongoing scene, such as the NPCs, locations, and plot elements. Depending on the scene, the GM can also make inquiries of the PCs themselves, requiring players to think beyond simple actions. This personalized approach encourages the conversation, enhancing the PCs' background, and deepens the players' investment in the story. In turn, each answer can be woven into the narrative, potentially creating new hubs and links for the Intrigue Map (p. 47).

- You catch a familiar face in the window. Someone who cannot be there, yet they are. *How did they die?*
- There's a memento from your past lying in the blood. *What is it?*
- As you enter the room, they narrow their eyes, frowning. You parted under poor circumstances. *What ended your relationship?*
- You've collected arcane tomes and bizarre artifacts over the years. *Where do you hide them?*
- Your contact feeds you reliable information whenever you need it. *Where did you first meet them?*
- Someone has protected you for years, maybe since childhood. *When did you become aware of them?*
- The City whispers to you, guiding you between shadows and light to wherever you need to be. *When did the City start talking to you?*
- You bolt upright in bed, chest pounding, woken by the nightmare. *Why did it frighten you so badly?*
- The door opens onto silence, revealing your empty apartment. *Why do you live alone?*
- Your phone rings, startling you. The voice is a pained whisper. *Who is it?*
- Your street-fighting skills have served you well over the years. *Who taught them to you?*

HIERARCHY OF HORROR

KULT: Divinity Lost is an intense roleplaying game that explores personal fears. However, horror is not a distinct literary genre, nor is it defined by specific literary styles. At its heart, horror is humanity's most primal and intimate emotion, revealing our contemporary anxieties. Depending on its inspiration, horror communally invokes three intensifying manifestations of fear – *Revulsion*, *Terror*, and *Dread*. Ultimately, the GM wishes to invoke each of these reactions in their players throughout their stories. This is the core tenant of the *Horror Contract*.

Horror reflects the world we live in, exposing our fears on cultural, existential, and personal levels. Indeed, what defines horror itself remains continuously debated, portrayed in countless ways through media and literature; or must horror be inherently scary and shocking to unnerve and terrify us. In our modern world, existential and metaphorical concepts inspire terror within us as easily as ghosts and zombies – perhaps, more so. Horror can make us scream or laugh hysterically, flinch away or stare in awe, and chill our hearts or engage our minds. But, above all else, horror makes us *feel*.

As horror remains forever amorphous and continually evolving, evoking this primal emotion in roleplaying games can prove challenging, even for experienced GMs. This section discusses the various aspects of communal fear, understanding the emotion, and how to effectively fulfill the *Horror Contract*.

The Roots of Fear

Fear has been humanity's constant companion throughout the millennia, continually maturing and reinventing itself. More importantly, fear has shaped and defined us sociologically, influencing our cultures, religions, and mythologies. It rules us like a tyrant, communal and inescapable. Currently, our most prevalent fears originate from four sources: the *naturalistic*, *paranormal*, *psychological*, and *scientific*.

Naturalistic fears originate from the natural world, including animals and insects, extreme environments, and violent natural events, such as earthquakes, extreme weather, floods, and wildfires. These threats are forever beyond humanity's control, reminding us of our insignificance in the natural order. We dread nature's merciless power, yet marvel at its grandeur. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, many of these fears originate from Gaia and the Borderlands.

Paranormal fears originate from the supernatural world, including angels, demons, spectral entities, and forgotten gods. These threats are beyond our abilities and understanding, striking without mercy or warning. They've lived with us since our imprisonment, dwelling at the edge of campfires and in our shattered memories. We've formed mythologies and religions around them: hollow visions of the True Reality. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, many of these fears originate from beyond the Illusion and Time and Space.

Psychological fears originate from within and without, reflecting our fractured psyches, guilt and insecurities, and mental traumas. We question our sanity and shun those who have lost their minds. This is the domain of demented desires, psychotic killers, and shattered perceptions. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, many of these fears originate from the Realms of Dreams, Madness, and Passion.

Scientific fears originate from our innate distrust of technology and those who wield it. These threats are both existential and physical, including biological weapons, illegal medical experiments, and sentient computers and machinery. We're fearful of the universe and what lies beyond our limited perceptions and understanding. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, many of these fears originate from Metropolis, the Machine City, and the Higher Powers.

However, no matter what inspires our fear, horror itself operates on two levels – the external and the internal. The GM can use either or both of these levels when reflecting the three manifestations of fear; i.e., revulsion, terror, and dread. Indeed, the most effective stories explore our fears on both the external and internal level, blurring the distinctions between the two. In turn, these horrors should elicit one of the three manifestations of fear, if not all. ***Book Two: Atmosphere*** discusses how to expand upon these concepts, reflecting external and internal fears on societal levels: *Personal*, *Surroundings*, and *World*.

EXTERNAL HORRORS

External horrors act upon the characters overtly, threatening their physical well-being and robbing them of their agency. These may be anything that invokes fear by acting upon the character, such as people, entities, locations, and natural events. Even external concepts and beliefs may fall under this category, as they inspire individuals into committing its greatest atrocities. The threats may be mundane or supernatural, ambiguous or obvious, and incidental or purposeful. No matter how they manifest, the characters must overcome these horrors or be consumed by them. In most cases, fear originates from the sheer randomness and overwhelming nature of these horrors, i.e., the characters becoming hapless victims of something beyond their ken.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the Illusion also serves as an ever-present external horror, as it directly acts upon the PCs, altering the world around them, and twisting their minds and flesh alike. Even when its true nature remains invisible to them, the Illusion continually assails the characters, separating them from the True Reality and their divinity. Once revealed, this existential threat infects all aspects of their lives, perpetually gnawing away at their souls.

- You notice the profound silence in the coffeeshop. Around you, the patrons have frozen in place, as if trapped in amber. Their eyes turn hemorrhage black, crimson tears staining their cheeks. As one, they each raise an accusing finger and point at you.
- Sewer water continues rising, filling the cramped tunnel. In moments, it reaches your waist, inching higher. The grate above is rusted shut, unmoved by your efforts. Stinking water swells and rises as the current dramatically shifts. There's something ascending from below.
- A hulking figure crashes through trees, abandoning any pretense of stealth. As he advances, his suit strains under his muscular weight, splitting at the tailored seams. A leathery pig's head raggedly sewn onto his flesh hides his human features.

- Something scuttles behind the thin walls, surreptitious and alien. A picture drops, knocked loosed by its movements, shattering loudly. At the noise, more scuttling *things* join its furtive cousin.
- A living carpet of mold coats the floors and furniture. You can almost taste its spores in the air, filling your nose and mouth with corruption. In an encrusted chair, the fuzzy, grey mass you thought was cushioning emits an all-too-human moan.
- The stairwell extends beyond the house's confines, ascending into darkness. Oily steam rises through its grated stairs, condensing on the rusted walls. A tinkling of bells drifts down, as if summoning you.
- Winds lash the windows, rain and clouds turning the day into midnight beyond them. You can hear the roof protesting as the storm threatens to tear it away. Lights flicker frantically, fighting against the inevitable. Then they surrender, plunging you into roaring darkness.

INTERNAL HORRORS

Internal horrors originate from humanity's fundamental nature, bubbling up from depths of our troubled psyches. These implicit fears expose our personal and societal anxieties, delving into existential concepts such as, cultural norms, human nature, and free will. They disorient us, tear at our beliefs and values, and undermine our feelings of security and self. We're consumed by our guilt and desires, driven to betray our morality and conscience. The most vile horrors lurk in our fractured souls.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the internal horrors are compounded by the High Powers' Principles, as their invasive influence controls and torments us. In many ways, these horrors are more insidious and, ultimately, more tragic as they can be potentially resisted and overcome. Humanity's worst enemy is itself, creating demons where none existed. We shape our own prisons and infect reality with our traumas. The monsters we fear the most are ourselves.

While abstract, internal horrors worm their way into each of us. Players can more easily identify with these manifestations of dread, as they are intensely personal. Through this identification, internal horrors gain more credibility and realism within the narrative. Players naturally project themselves onto their PCs, following their descent into anguish and insanity. As such, they'll willingly step into the shadows, invested to see what lays beyond the darkness.

- A barking cough erupts nearby. These people are too close, forced onto the bus like human cattle. You can feel their infections upon your skin. Their sicknesses invade your throat and lungs. You've got to get out before their diseases infect you. *Get out now!*
- You rub the sores on your knuckles, plucking at the torn skin. Your heart pounds, the adrenaline turning toxic in your veins. You wanted to kill them. To smash their goddamned faces into bloody paste. But you can't even remember why.
- Their gaze touches your wrist, narrowing with concern. You tug the sleeve down over the scars, curling into yourself. Their simpleton smiles and platitudes cut you, offering no solace from the pain. They can never know about the hole rotting inside you.
- You plead through bloody lips, begging them to stay. They can't leave you. Not like this. You promise to forgive them again. Just like you always have. You fear being alone more than the way they hurt you.
- You lay in bed, unable to move. Your limbs remain leaden as an invisible weight presses down on your chest. The sheets cling to you, rank with sweat and fear. But better to stay in this self-made tomb than face the world beyond its protective walls.
- Scrub the sins away. The scent of cum and spit mark your skin, reminders of your depravity. *Scrub*, *scrub*, *scrub*. Punish yourself. Dull the ache already rising inside you. Kill the shameful yearning that drives you to defile yourself. Your weakness must be purified.
- Why can't they see the Truth? The evidence is everywhere, screaming it right in their goddamned faces. The murdered kids. The hidden temples. The *things* wearing human faces. Wait. Maybe they do know. Maybe they're lying to you. Trying to make you forget what you've seen.

Revulsion

Revulsion is fear's most common and basest manifestation. Also known as the 'gross-out,' revulsion strikes at humanity's primal emotions, invoking our natural instinct to recoil from the impure, unfamiliar, and violent. For this reason, revulsion is one of the easiest types of fear to evoke, as it typically relies on gut-reactions, usually created through jump-scares, taboo subjects, or by inciting disgust. For this reason, revulsion frequently falls under the domains of *extreme horror* and *body horror* (see ***Disturbing Behaviors*** and ***New Flesh, Ancient Desires***, p. 178 & 192). This sordid imagery assaults our senses and thoughts, as each new grotesquerie strains our hearts and churns our stomachs. It plunges our faces in the viscera and filth, making us flinch and recoil from the anguish and ugliness.

Despite revulsion's simplicity, when used deftly, this manifestation of fear can create profound juxtapositions in the conversation. It forces the players outside their comfort zone, plunging them into the depraved depths. As discussed in ***Disturbing Behaviors***, revulsion can provide the perfect medium for examining taboo subject matter, such as sexuality and sociopolitical issues. It also provides stark contrasts, turning mundane subjects on their head, revealing their seedy underbelly. The GM can weave these unexpected intense threads into her stories, throwing the players off-guard and allowing them to explore new levels of fear.

Due to our primal fear, instilling horror through revulsion can be seductively undemanding, which may explain its growing prevalence in horror cinema, especially slashers and the new extreme. Unfortunately, revulsion can quickly lose its shock value and rapidly become uninspiring and trite; all fearful anticipation buried under senseless gore. Indeed, it can often offend rather than scare, turning stories into pointless streams of depravity. From Inferno's charnel houses to Passion's sensual horrors, the ***KULT*** mythos contains countless opportunities to disgust and disturb. Yet, the GM needs to resist the urge to overwhelm her player's senses with a cornucopia of cruelties. The urge to descend into these bloody nightmares may be tempting, but it is ultimately counterproductive. All things must be used in moderation, even fear.

- The tiny hand thrusts up through the fresh, loose dirt. An animal or bird has been at its chubby, digits, peeling strips away to get to softer morsels. Someone has stuck a makeshift grave marker above the small mound. It reads, #8.
- The hamster-cage stink overwhelms you. Squat forms huddle together in a nest of soiled newspapers and moldy leaves. Filth cakes their naked bodies, matting their downy fur. Restlessly, they squirm and writhe, be it for warmth or gratification, you cannot tell.
- She calmly heats the plier's jaws with the butane torch. The metal tips turn an angry orange. Satisfied, she turns to you, tool in hand. "Hold him down," she tells your friends. When the pliers enter the wound, pain rips through your entire essence. As the world fades, you strangely recall barbecuing with your family last summer.
- He goes down harder than you expected. His face catches the table's edge, sending broken teeth cascading across its surface. Blood soon follows, pumping out of the gagged hole where his smirking grin once was. It forms around his ruined head like a crimson halo.
- His head bobs rhythmically over the thing's pendulous sex. A low growl echoes in its doughy chest, causing organs and muscles to strain beneath the translucent skin. Its death-pale lips curl back, releasing the sluggish tongue from within.
- The body's gas-bloated belly deflates, rumbling like a cancerous breath. Puke chokes you, flooding your sinuses, as your hands slip inside the rotted guts. You're forced to push deeper, up to your wrists, and then forearms, frantically searching for the plastic bag hidden inside.
- He puts the shooter glass in front of you, swirling the musky cream inside. His cracked lips curl into a cruel smile, mimicking the faces around him. You idly wonder how many contributed to this *drink*. "Drink up, pup," he sneers. "Let's see if you have what it takes."

Terror

Terror represents our psychological reaction to experiencing an unsettling event or transcendent encounter – be it natural or paranormal in origin. Terror is the razor blade in your apple, the rotted hand clawing out through the wall, the impossible shape standing at your window, the malformed beast walking into your headlights. It hurls us into confusion, doubt, and ultimately fear, violating our conceptions of normalcy. Our conscious minds cannot process or understand its manifestation, as we lack any frame of reference. We simply recognize the tangible threat, despite its surreal nature. Yet, unable to assess the terror's true nature, we are shocked into fear and helplessness. We are no longer safe, and never will be again.

Terror resonates throughout ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** narratives, as it represents the normal human response to the Illusion crumbling. In addition to the immediate threat, the existential implications of the True Reality inflicts deep psychological scars. Otherworldly monsters, such as Children of the Night, living dead, nepharites, and wolvens, are perfect representations of terror. Indeed, this manifestation of fear plays an integral part of ***KULT*** narratives, as the Illusion reveals the supernatural whenever it tears. Due to its transcendent nature, terror is intimately tied to the sublime, which is discussed in ***Exquisite Horrors*** (p. 208).

Despite its prevalence in the game, terror possesses the same inherent weakness as revulsion, i.e., the shock fades over time. We become acclimatized to its fearful effects, mentally accepting its unnatural origins. As stated by the Principle, *Insinuate the Supernatural*, the GM should keep the terrors in the shadows, never fully revealing them, lest they lose their shock value. Even when fully revealed, the encounter should be short and brutal, allowing the players little time to fully process what they've experienced. Maintain an aura of mystery and wonder to the nightmarish worlds and monsters, so the players never feel truly safe.

- The murmur comes again, drawing you closer to the cistern. You glance over its crumbling edge and the shape below smiles up at you. Its face is an infected wound, wreathed in grimy hair. But its grin remains untouched by decay, all pearly teeth glistening in the dark.
- A woman stands beneath the underpass, barely visible in her white gown. As you watch, canid creatures emerge from the deep shadows, blunt heads nuzzling at her legs and crotch, purple tongues licking at her delicate fingers. She caresses their mottled fur, as if in reward for their attention.
- With a reluctant sigh, the bartender pushes back from the counter. He grabs his upper and lower jaw, yanking violently. Bones crack and meat tears, as he hinges his skull backward. Long fingers emerge from his torn neck, curling and tightening, as something begins freeing itself from the bloody stump.
- The crash's impact has ground her body into little more than fractured limbs, moist gristle, and bloody shards. As you lean closer, her ruined eyes flutter open. Painted lips stretch back, "You didn't think you'd get rid of me that easy, did you baby?"
- A soft breeze rustles the trees, disturbing the leaves enough to let the moonlight through. It splashes across a cherub face, nestled amongst the benches above you. Tittering laughter erupts from all directions, as infantile bodies with swollen bellies and hooked claws rouse themselves from slumber.
- Sulfurous air exhales from the tunnel, as the train slides into the subway station. A meshing of abortive flesh and writhing metal, its bulk shutters, slows, and halts. Cavities open along its length, revealing yellowed molars and undulating tongues. Your fellow commuters remain ignorant of the monstrosity, dumbly herding into the eager maws.
- The cab reeks of stale perfume and smoke. When you close the door, the driver flips the meter. Maggots rain down from his skeletal hand. In the mirror, you see his milky eyes looking back at you. "You going all the way to the end?" he gurgles up through the wet hole in his throat.

Dread

The ultimate level of horror is *dread*, which represents our primal fear of the unknown. While revulsion and terror rely on the scare itself, dread derives from suspense and the *anticipation* of an impending shock. Dread is standing in the dark and realizing you're not alone. Dread is knowing something is behind your bedroom door. Dread is the lump under your skin, the grey shape in the fog, the living silence at the other end of the phone. It is formless, nameless, and beyond comprehension. As such, dread relies heavily on ambiguity, foreshadowing, and, perhaps most importantly, inevitability. We recognize our impending destruction and can do nothing to avoid it.

Dread is also an existential fear, feeding off our sense of helplessness and inevitable destruction. As our world turns alien and hostile, we no longer recognize what is truly safe, dissolving our sense of self and security. Facing the vast unknown, we recognize our fearful insignificance, crying out as we are deprived of control of our bodies, minds, and, ultimately, our fates. This denial of agency terrifies us to very core.

As such, dread is an intensely personal fear, as we instinctively fill the void with our anxieties, giving them horrible shape. Yet, whatever awaits us in the shadows can never match the nightmares we envision in our heads beforehand. The players are no different, which can work to the GM's advantage, as she already know what frightens them from the *Horror Contract*. The GM must allow the players to scare *themselves* by feeding their doubts and fears. This dreadful anticipation will far outweigh any horror they can produce.

- Street sounds fade beneath an organic silence, all noise consumed by the heavy foliage. Mossy steps lead toward the forgotten shrine, littered with decaying blossoms and leaves. A decrepit villa slumps over on its side. Pregnant shadows lurk beyond its ruined doorway, swelling with malice as daylight retreats.
- Someone has hung plastic sheeting throughout the unfinished house. It crumples softly, moved by the weak breeze. Light filters through the opaque sheeting, outlining the house's skeletal walls. Up ahead, something indistinct and humanoid stands there, perfectly still, but definitely alive.
- Following the screams, you force your way into the bathroom only to find it impossibly empty. Its antiseptic intensity pains your senses. Someone has written on the mirror, *Here is not Here*. The shower drips, nearly deafening in the sublime quiet.
- A solitary chair sits in the middle of the hotel's long corridor. Someone has propped a mascot's costume up in it; a comical wolf with bluish fur. Its large head lopes to one side, offering an idiot's grin of sharp teeth. You feel something gazing out of its empty eye sockets.
- As your foot touches the first step down, something beneath the slatted stairs *snuffles*. The raspy pig-noise ends as quickly as it came. You may not have heard anything to begin with. Below, a single lightbulb swings back and forth on its frayed cord. It illuminates nothing by an old washer/dryer set and a pile of wet clothes.
- The elevator comes to an unexpected halt. After a moment, the doors shutter open, allowing light to bleed in emptiness. Beyond, you see an unfinished floor; little more than stuccoed pillars and bare wiring. A solitary exit sign glows in the distance.
- You return to the kitchen, only to feel an unexpected draft. The rear door rests half-open, allowing whispers of rain to come through. Otherwise, the room seems just as you left it moments ago. The fridge noisily kicks in, as if to hide any sounds in the house.

MIXING IT UP

When running ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the GM should employ all three types of fear, continually drifting between revulsion, terror, and dread. These manifestations of horror are intricately connected, complimenting one another. Revulsion can incite disquiet and disgust, feeding the aura of gnawing dread. Displays of terror hitting in quick succession can inspire panic and revulsion. Dread slowly, exquisitely drags the players toward the terrifying reveal. Furthermore, as with cinematic storytelling, by striking the proper balance of fear, the GM effectively maintains the narrative's ***Rhythm of Horror***: player anxiety and fear rising and falling in consuming waves.

- An elegant machine dominates the stark room, thrumming rhythmically. A naked male torso rests amidst its polished chrome and steel. Pistons rise and fall in his chest cavity, powered by gears and greasy hoses. His mouth droops open in ecstasy, while his pained erection jerks, feeding the clear pump encasing it.
- The wooden floor quivers beneath your feet. Dozens of eyes snap open, watching you from its gnarled surface. Your heel sinks into one's soft membrane, causing it to pop loudly. Fetid blood and humor splash over your skin, tacky and hot. The eyes flutter, as if sharing this pain. Around you, the house heaves, awakened by your transgression.
- Vagrants amble into the backstreet, closing off your only exit. Lamp light illuminates their faces – lumpen masks of scar tissue. They stop several yards away, forming a living wall of bodies and makeshift weapons. Beyond them, something vast and dark fills the narrow alley, drawing nearer.
- A wet clunking erupts on the darkened stairwell above, descending with hideous sloth. At first, you think the lumpen shape is a child's toy, but that fantasy is quickly dispelled. The human head bounces to an uneasy stop at your feet, its features impossibly familiar. Your frightened face stares up at you, mouthing soundless words. *Behind you.*
- Beyond the elegant arch, blue moonlight pools on the ballroom floor. Someone has arranged mannequins around the chamber, locked in silent dances. Strands of music reach you, beckoning your body to join in this dance macabre. Dozens of plastic heads turn as one, revealing faces draped in flayed skin.
- Her hands crawl up her chest, painfully digging into the meat of her breasts and throat. "Please," she pleads, "Stop them." Metallic spurs and cables split free from her palms and fingers, splattering her dress in oily blood.
- You dimly wake. Velvet fingers stroke your sex, as warm lips trace along your neck. Fleshy curves press into your back, yearning with desire. But in the vanity mirror you see only yourself on the bed. Then, the fingers *tighten.*

THE RHYTHM OF HORROR

No matter what narratives the GM explores, she must temper the fearful materials she present. Horror is a tricky emotion; its power over us is intensely profound and invasive. Yet, in time, we become desensitized to its stifling effects. A continual onslaught of travesty and terror dulls the players' anxiety, forcing the GM to reach for greater extremes to elicit the same emotional response. Fear loses its meaning, and the narrative devolves into an endless stream of toothless scares. True dread comes from the anticipation of the impending scare, not the scare itself. As such, the most affecting narratives utilize this rise and fall of anxiety, also known as the *tension/release cycle.*

In its simplest terms, the *tension/release cycle* steadily intensifies the players' anxiety, pushing it toward its crescendo, and then releasing it in a moment of crisis. After this fearful moment, the players are briefly granted an opportunity to recover and reassess their situation. However, this false sense of security soon fades and the cycle begins again – player anxiety returning as they anticipate the next scare. This cycle of fear continues throughout the story, dragging the players ever deeper into the horror. They instinctively know things can only get worse, and the GM need only turn the screws tighter to make them suffer. This is also why the *tension/release cycle* plays so heavily into the Agenda, *Keep the PCs on edge, only allowing them moments of respite.*

However, by its nature, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** lacks many of the cinematic techniques normally used to create the tension/release cycle, such as different camera angles, overexposures, sound effects, and the (infamous) Lewton Bus. Even so, the GM can duplicate similar effects through the conversation, adjusting them to fit the collaborative storytelling experience. Common horror techniques include creating player anticipation, instilling uncertainty, and defying player expectations.

Dreadful Anticipation

Producing genuine scares during the conversation can be achieved by eliciting true anticipation in the players. Also known as *anticipatory reactive sequences*, the GM narratively frames scenes to suggest impending scares by revealing possible threats to the players. In effect, the GM baits her dreadful trap with implied horrors, inspiring anxiety and doubt in the players' minds. The players know there is a scare coming soon – and that's entirely the point. They contribute to their own tension, shaping the unseen horror in their minds, while being drawn deeper into the story. This is the essence of dread. Only when the GM deems it, the threat is revealed – be it through revulsion and/or terror. The trap closes and the tension/release cycle concludes. The players are rewarded with the scare and have directly participated in its ultimate fulfillment.

For example, if two PCs are casually talking when a creature crashes through the nearby window, the GM has achieved terror – that momentary fear from shock and confusion. But with no build up, the scare fades quickly, lost in the resolution. However, if only the creature's presence is revealed, player anxiety grows as they focus on the impending threat. Slowly, the GM hints at its existence through various Moves and narrative clues. Even if the PCs remain ignorant, the players will be unable to dispel this foreknowledge, intensifying their personal fear. As the scene progresses, they will jump at every shadow, cringe at every sound, fully expecting the beast to strike. Rather than achieving an instantaneous burst of fear, tension intensifies over several minutes, fed by their dreadful anticipation.

KEEP IT PERSONAL

When the players are invested in the narrative, their anticipation of impending horrors becomes more intense. The GM should frame threats for the PCs and the players. Get under the player's skin by challenging their PC with personal horrors, drawing on the *Horror Contract*. Depending on the themes and narrative being explored, each PC's intimate fear may manifest in reality, investing the players even further.

INCREASE THE STAKES AND MAKE THEM HURT

Deepen player investiture by making the stakes matter, and that consequences to the PCs are severe. Horror narratives constantly feature characters making poor choices, deepening our anxiety for them. Similarly, players knowingly place their PCs in harm's way, stepping into the darkness, despite the terrifying risks. They weave Dark Secrets and Disadvantages into the PCs' lives, aware that these setbacks will eventually rear their ugly heads. The GM should reward the players' trust by fulfilling their fears with something far worse than they imagine.

EVERYTHING COMES AT A PRICE

Everything the PCs gain should come with a price; even their relationships. What are the consequences of the PCs' action and how far will they resonate through the story? Everyone has distinct needs and wants, imposing them upon the PCs, for good or ill. Relations and important NPCs can be threatened, turned against them, or much worse. When the PCs make a deal, what strings are attached to the agreement – *what aren't they seeing*? Twist the players around with these worrisome thoughts and added pressures.

TIME IS PRECIOUS

Time is the hunter that stalks us all. When the clock is ticking, the players are placed under additional pressure, adding to their tension. When the stakes are high, this time crunch is even worse, as every moment is the difference between life and death. This also forces players to take additional risks, moving into the darkness ignorant to what's waiting there. The GM can make the players feel this strain by including actual time-limits, reflecting the scenario's milestones. During combat and/or frantic situations, limit their time to declare Moves. If the player doesn't make a decision in time, their character freezes in the story, suffering the consequences thereof.

INSPIRE FOCUSED PARTICIPATION

Due to its interactive nature, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** requires more intensive player participation than some other roleplaying games. Even when not involved in the current scene, they should remain attentive and be prepared to invest themselves in the conversation. Use common sense rules, such as no cellphones, no unrelated joking and/or fooling around, and allowing breaks after intense scenes. This helps everyone remain immersed in the horrifying atmosphere.

Fearful Uncertainty

Although players have agreed to be scared, the nature of roleplaying creates meta-barriers between them and the story. Even with appropriate atmosphere and setting, players are continually aware that *it is only a game*, and they are safe. This awareness unconsciously filters down into their PCs, stripping away some of the narrative's impact and diminishing their fear. However, the GM can subvert this preconception, undermining the players' sense of security. She can utilize the conversation to instill fear and uncertainty into the players, turning their expectations against them. As always, use the techniques below in moderation; otherwise, they'll become expected and lose their effect. Also, this does not mean to go against the *Horror Contract's* promise – player safety must be maintained.

ADDRESS THE CHARACTERS, NOT THE PLAYERS

This Principle's psychological power to instill fear and uncertainty cannot be understated. It invests the players more deeply in their PCs and the terrible events unfolding around them. Furthermore, by addressing the PCs, the GM blurs the lines between story reality and game reality, adding suspense and tension for the players themselves. In addition, the Principle helps establish focus on the story, pushing out mundane distractions.

More importantly, by *Addressing the PCs*, the GM personalizes the conversation for the players. Indeed, with practice, the GM can establish the horror atmosphere through her voice alone. Altering her inflection promotes tension by emphasizing specific events, much like changes in music volume do cinematically. By softening her voice, the GM draws the players closer, as they must focus on every word – adding suspense and mystery to the scene.

ARE YOU SURE?

Normally, when players make their Moves, they do so with confidence and conviction – even during tense moments. However, the GM can instill uncertainty and fear by questioning the player's choice; i.e., "Are you sure you want to do that?" She can accent this by acting nervous and worried, such as taking a sharp breath or frowning. In effect, their 'reaction' breaks the game's fourth wall, inspiring doubt and fear in the players. Instinctively, they'll begin questioning their decisions, fearing for their PC's well-being. This technique can be highly effective when used at unexpected times and during moments of respite, creating ambiguity in the narrative.

CONDITIONING THE PLAYERS

Dread comes from anticipation of terror, provoking primal fears through known, yet hidden, horrors. By entering into the *Horror Contract*, players understand that their fears will manifest somehow, but can never be sure of when. The GM can utilize this anticipation to condition her players, purposefully provoking their anxieties. During the conversation, the GM establishes narrative conditions that reveal impending threats. For example, the sky turns cerulean blue and gold prior to the Illusion collapsing, or the air smells of cinnamon and mold when an entity approaches. As these warnings become established in the fiction, they'll continually trigger the players' fear, as they recognize the inevitable horrors to come.

The GM may also condition the players by using techniques that break the fourth wall. For example, the GM can announce the Illusion tearing by lightly rapping her fingers on the table, gathering in intensity. She can whisper to herself, counting down to the threat's appearance. As the game progresses, the players will focus on the GM, anxiously looking for new warnings and clues.

RELY ON NOTHING AND NO ONE

In horror stories, protagonists frequently face challenges beyond their abilities and must use their ingenuity to survive. *KULT: Divinity Lost* provides the GM with numerous Moves, such as ***Take Their Stuff and Turn Their Move Against Them***, that are specifically designed to place PCs at a disadvantage. The GM should create situations where the players are forced to use their wits, rather than simply rely on their PCs' Advantages. Steal their resources and separate them from each other and their Relations, forcing them to work toward solutions other than rolling dice. In addition to heightening their tension, achieving their goals through resourcefulness and perseverance is more meaningful and rewarding.

Defy Expectations

We instinctively fear the unknown, filling the shadows with our personal fears and nightmares. Virtually nothing the GM can describe will match the terrors dwelling within her players' imaginations. Furthermore, most *KULT: Divinity Lost* players are aficionados of horror, instinctively recognizing its common tropes and meta-narratives, as well as the game's mechanics and mythos. Because of this, players can form conscious expectations, inadvertently undermining their gaming experience. As such, the GM must defy these expectations and reinforce their fear of the unknown.

Learning player expectations comes naturally through the collaborative storytelling process and the *Horror Contract*. As the game progresses, the GM draws upon these resources, guiding the conversation accordingly and allowing the players to relax into the narrative's ebb and flow. Then, the GM subverts their preconceptions, purposefully feeding player expectations of one fearful outcome, only to pull the rug out from under them. Soon enough, the players will never know what to expect, feeling continually off-balance, adding to their personal fear.

ALWAYS DESCRIBE, NEVER DEFINE

Always narratively describe the world and its creatures; never simply state, "It's a zeloth..." Not only does this encourage and expand the fiction, descriptions intensify the players' unease, as their minds naturally try to process what their characters are witnessing. This technique works well with *Defy Expectations*, as the players do not immediately know what they're dealing with, which adds to their fear. Furthermore, as the GM controls the world itself, she can subvert player preconceptions by personalizing their creatures (see below).

The GM can also use her descriptions to accent the pace, slowing down time, and focusing the narrative on intense moments. When she wish to build suspense or explore specific horrors, the GM maintains the conversation in that scene. Explain how they're digging the bullet from the wound, describe the subtle details of the creature's nest, or outline the nightmarish landscape the PCs have stumbled upon. Then let the players contribute to the description, helping to bring the scene to horrid life.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

KULT: Divinity Lost is a world of grays, where concepts like good and evil and right and wrong blur frequently. This plays heavily into the game's underlying horror, where societal boundaries lack true meaning and reality itself is tenuous. The Higher Powers and their Principles do not fit into simplistic definitions, transcending standard morality and philosophical structures. The PCs and characters around them indulge their personal desires and succumb to fervent beliefs, blindly following them to devastating consequences. The GM should continually test the players' views, redefining their understanding of good and evil. Soon, they cannot even trust themselves, as their own angels and demons will be indivisible.

FEAR IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

Humanity feels safe in the light and fears the dark. Our anticipation deepens as day surrenders to the night. We fear the darkened cellar, the deep underground, the unlit rooms. Our nightmares' monsters lurk beyond the firelight, fleeing with the approaching dawn. This ingrained belief perpetuates our

communal psyches, shaping our expectations in horror stories. Normally, when we experience fearful narratives, our anxieties intensify in the dark and lessen in the light. As such, by defying this expectation the GM can heighten their terrors significantly. Indeed, when handled well, brightly lit horrors can inspire far deeper fears.

Witnessing sunlit grotesqueries creates an unfamiliar sense of dread. Nightmares bathed in fluorescent light can maintain their ambiguity and fear. Violence and monstrosities can dwell in the daylight, yet lose none of their blood-chilling menace. Existential horrors are more pronounced when outlined in the harsh sun or the hazy fog of day. Make the players fear the light and rob them of their false securities. *Nowhere is safe.*

SUBVERT PRECONCEPTIONS

Inevitably, players may become familiar with the hidden aspects of the *KULT* mythos, knowing that they're dealing with a nepharite or lictor, as well as how to overcome these threats. Not only does this interfere with the game, it detracts from the personal horror. As such, the GM should feel free to alter the fiction, add unexpected twists, and describe the Illusion in new ways. By defying the players' expectations, they'll never know exactly what they're facing.

RUNNING THE SESSION

Due to ***KULT: Divinity Lost's*** highly improvisational nature, the GM should remain consciously aware of the game's rhythm and flow. This allows her to maintain narrative structure during each session, while preventing the conversation from becoming derailed by various distractions. This also allows the GM to maintain proper pacing throughout the game and encourage the conversation to continually inspire player tension. The following techniques are only suggestions and can be adjusted according to the group's experience and needs.

Pregame

Prior to each session, the GM should conduct some minor pregame preparations to avoid delays. This process may be woven into the downtime process (p. 62, allowing the GM to develop the Intrigue Map and introduce new story threads. While over-preparation can be detrimental to ***KULT's*** collaborative format, any game can still benefit from using some of the following common-sense tips prior to beginning the session.

Prepare your materials: Make sure to have all your gaming materials prepared and in order. This includes things like index cards or computer files detailing your threats, storylines, and NPCs, as well as the PCs themselves. If you're using specific sections of the rulebook and/or supplements, the GM should tag them for easy reference. Any handouts, props, or music should be prepared and accessible. These preparations help avoid stopping the game to find specific rules/notes that would disrupt the atmosphere you've all worked so hard to create.

Set limits and expectations: Establish the amount of time the group intends to play. Also, if the players wish to accomplish something in-game specific, make note of this as well. In this way, you'll have a general idea of how to properly pace the session, and not be caught off-guard by needing to suddenly wrap up because the group runs out of time. Also agree to specific times for your intermissions, if required. This will help you shape the narrative flow to avoid disruptions and even increase tension, e.g., "*The bloodied handle begins turning by itself and... We'll find out after our break.*"

Roll for Disadvantages: Have the players roll for appropriate Disadvantages, and record any Hold you acquire on the Session sheet (see ***Appendix***). If inspiration strikes you, note down any possible Moves you think would be appropriate to the story.

Plant the Bombs: Prepare your bombs as necessary (p. 58), and make note of the 'unexploded' bombs left over from previous sessions. If they won't fit into the session's narrative flow, adjust them accordingly and/or develop new ones.

Bait the Dramatic Hooks: Review what Dramatic Hooks are still outstanding, adding or revising them with the players (p. 60). Determine any potential links they might have with upcoming threats.

Opening Game

If this is your group's first session, follow the format outlined in ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** (p. 172). Otherwise, roughly the first half-hour should be spent with everyone getting in-character and reviewing what transpired during the previous session. From this point forward, the GM should remember to *Address the Characters, Not the Players*, thus establishing the game space and atmosphere. Depending on how the last session ended, the GM should ask the players questions, such as:

- Where are you now?
- How have you been spending your time?
- Which Relations have you dealt with recently?
- What are your current goals?
- How are you feeling?

The GM can use their answers to shape the current session, laying the groundwork for potential threats and character interactions. However, much like serialized storytelling, if the previous session ended on a cliffhanger, the unresolved actions/conflicts should be dealt with. Jump right into the action, forcing hard choices and establishing the stakes involved in your story. This shock to the system helps focus the players and get them invested back into the game world. Once the threat is resolved, the PCs can spend time recovering or moving onto the next scene in the story.

Midgame

Once the scenario's exposition and inciting incident are complete, it moves into *midgame*. This is the true meat of the session, where the story's core milestones and turning points transpire. Threats are introduced and resolved, adding to the rising tension – moving ever closer to the narrative climax. Most, if not all, of the PCs' dramatic moments and bombs should be resolved during this time, so they do not conflict with or overshadow the endgame. Any threads not resolved by endgame can be held over until the next session.

Reserve most of your allowable time for midgame, and allow it to flow and progress organically. Allow the collaborative storytelling process to play out, and encourage the players' ideas and suggestions. Follow narrative threads and role-play intimate scenes to their fullest, even if they draw away from the main storyline. However, be mindful of the time and take any required breaks prior to the endgame. This will help the story transition smoothly and without interruptions. Few things disrupt intriguing stories more than being forced to suddenly rush everything.

Endgame

Endgame focuses on the story's climax: where the rising tension finally breaks and the narrative is resolved. This is also the *black moment* of the story, when everything turns against the PCs and the stakes cannot get higher for them. All their fears come true and they are tested beyond their limits. As stated before, the group should devote adequate time to this section, so the ultimate resolution won't feel rushed or unrealistic.

However, if you're running out of time or major story arcs remain unresolved, it is always best to end the session on a *cliffhanger or moment of crisis*. As with any good book or movie, this narrative hook makes the players want to return for more, investing them further in the story. In this case, the GM can skip the epilogue entirely and move directly to postgame.

Once narrative concludes, the GM should provide the players an *epilogue* – the in-character summary of the story's events. In addition to releasing tension, this allows the players to properly resolve any loose threads they have. If adequate time remains, the players may wish to have a *Denouement*. Like downtime, this in-character roleplaying revolves around the PC's normal lives after the main storyline. They can interact with Relations, go about their daily routine, conduct research, wrap up minor plot points, and generally flesh out their PC's world. In effect, the denouement allows the group time to examine how the story changed the PCs and their lives.

Postgame

Postgame is the out-of-character wrap up and discussion of the session. This includes completing any final paperwork, such as recording **Experience**. Indeed, most game groups need time to talk about the game story and their characters, exchanging ideas and thoughts about where things are progressing. Perhaps most importantly, postgame allows everyone an opportunity to decompress and return to the real-world. As with other horror games, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** deals with unpleasant themes, potentially leaving the GM and players feeling anxious and upset at the end of an intense session. **DO NOT** allow your players to leave disturbed or scared. Use the postgame to reestablish their sense of security and discuss anything that troubled them during the session. Unresolved issues can easily produce negative feelings about the game and the roleplaying experience.

ADVANCED STORYTELLING

Due to the conversation's flexible nature, the GM can present her narratives through cinematic and literary techniques, making them more akin to movies, television, and novels. As the GM grows more comfortable with her role, she may wish to incorporate advanced techniques into her sessions. With the players' consent, the GM can introduce storytelling concepts such as flashbacks, *In Media Res*, parallel stories, and prologues to heighten the group's roleplaying experience. Some of these techniques are discussed below. All, some, or none of these can be incorporated into games, as long as they create an effective narrative.

Handouts/Props

Although they require additional preparation and time, the GM may wish to provide the players with various handouts and props during the session. These roleplaying tools are wide and varied, including notes and letters written by the NPCs, locational maps, vital clues, and reference images. Tactile props help maintain player engagement and investment, and can potentially become part of the conversation. Upcoming supplemental materials, such as ***Labyrinths and Secret Chambers***, ***Tarot Cards***, ***The Deck of Traits***, and ***The Weapon Deck***, can provide the group with new props and tools to enhance their game.

Props do not need to represent 'physical' items within the story. Instead, they can reflect metaphorical and symbolic concepts within the current narrative, providing the players with a frame of reference for esoteric ideas.

At the beginning of the session, the GM arranges a chessboard and set up the pieces, representing the PCs and the significant NPCs. However, she do not inform the players of its purpose or meaning, adding to the mystique. As the session progresses, she move the pieces to represent changes in power structures between the opposing groups – again, with no explanation. The players will likely begin working to decipher these movements, slowly translating how events in-game affect the board, thus, increasing their investment in the game itself.

Prologues

Prologues are introductory stories that reveal events prior to the actual narrative – much like the opening chapter of a novel or movie. Although the prologue revolves around different characters, the events must be directly tied to core narrative, representing the narrative's backstory and/or underlying plot points. In horror fiction, prologues can foreshadow the threats the PCs will eventually face. While the PCs may remain ignorant of these events, the *players* will have this out-of-character foreknowledge and become increasingly tense as the story incorporates them.

Unfortunately, prologues require additional preparation prior to running them, as they're effectively full-fledged scenarios with detailed histories, NPCs, and locations. The GM should have at least rudimentary notes prepared before introducing any prologue. She should also refrain from it overshadowing the main story, as ***KULT*** is ultimately about the PCs and their involvement in the narrative. Due to their complexity, prologues are best reserved for long-lasting campaigns.

> In the published scenario, *Taroticum*, the players take on the role of characters vital to the entire narrative. These preceding events are not only connected to the PCs themselves, but also provide the players insight into the vast horrors awaiting them in the near future. These implications create uncertainty in the players – and with uncertainty comes fear.

Flashbacks

Similar to prologues, flashbacks are scenes that portray events prior to the current narrative. However, flashbacks can be introduced at any point during the main storyline, temporarily breaking up the narrative thread. Usually, these are events from one (or more) of the PC's lives. Thus, flashbacks provide additional context to the current storyline, as well as allow the GM and players to flesh out the PCs' backstory. The scene may explain why they've developed their Dark Secrets or Disadvantages, as well as provide further insight into their relationship with specific NPCs.

However, as effective as they are for conveying additional information, the GM should keep flashbacks to a minimum. They break up the narrative flow and can become a distraction. Furthermore, they can disrupt the tension/release cycle, as they allow the players a respite from the ongoing horrors. When implying the flashback, the GM should also keep its progression short – or include the other players as participants. Otherwise, they will feel left out, as emphasis is placed on the associated PC.

> The group arrives at the asylum, seeking to close a portal to Inferno. This psychic rift occurred due to *The Scientist's* past experiment. To flesh out these important past events, the GM begins a flashback of that moment. *The Scientist's* player portrays the younger version of the PC, while the other players take the roles of lab assistants and patients. This provides insight into the PC, as well as sets up the impending conflict with the entity they summoned.

MEMORIES

Memories are tricky, filled with inaccuracies and falsehoods. This is particularly true for PC's memories connected to their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages. Many deny, obscure, or completely wipe these memories from existence, due to the guilt and trauma. When presenting flashbacks, the GM (and player) can introduce new events that challenge or contradict these original memories. The new roleplay reveals how the PC's perception of his backstory has been mentally skewed or repressed. These revelations can uncover hidden secrets and present new opportunities for roleplay.

> Continuing the example above, *The Scientist's* memories of the night he ***Returned from the Other Side*** are foggy. As the Flashback plays out, the GM introduces new aspects to the PC's version of these events, revealing that the PC wasn't as innocent as he made himself out to be. The player encourages this horrific revelation, as it adds new context to their PC.

DREAM SEQUENCES

Another common trope in horror is the dream sequence, usually involving characters unaware that they're actually asleep until things begin to unravel. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, dreams are very real and potentially deadly. Through Moves such as ***Caught in the Dream***, the GM can introduce Limbo without the players even realizing that the PCs are dreaming. As the sequence progresses, the normal world becomes increasingly surreal and unnerving until the true horrors are revealed. Clues and information can be provided through various encounters, allowing the GM to reveal aspects of the story the players may have missed. However, as with cinema, the "It was all a dream" trope can quickly become tiresome – so use sparingly.

> During the conversation, *The Prophet* enters an old church, searching for their his. As the scene progresses, the GM begins introducing familiar sights and smells, creating a sense of déjà vu. When the PC opens the door to the vestry, he find himself standing in the village they did missionary work in. The animated corpses of his parishioners are waiting for him, guiding him forward. Soon enough, he wake up screaming in his bed, and only then the *player* realizes this was a dream.

Parallel Threads

Due to plot circumstances, the PCs may become separated, yet simultaneously strive to resolve the overall plotline. In this case, the GM needs to provide both groups of players equal play time to avoid boredom and distraction. These parallel threads progress with the divergent groups working toward shared, common goals. As their PCs succeed/fail at their goal on one side, tension rises for the other group, who are effectively dependent on the first. Furthermore, while the information acquired is technically out-of-character knowledge, the players' tension naturally increases, as they know what is transpiring in the other location.

A more complicated, yet intriguing, version of this technique is to have wholly separate groups, completely unaware of one another, yet working toward the same goal. If possible, separate the players and move between the groups. This type of parallel thread can be effectively used in convention settings, where two (or more groups) work toward the same goal – either as allies or enemies. The GM tracks each group's progress through separate milestones. An auxiliary GM can be helpful, in this case; each GM simultaneously running the divergent groups and consulting at set time-stamps.

You are the Monster

More narrative twist than technique, the GM can have the PCs become the monsters. Perhaps the PCs are possessed by nepharites, influenced by a Dream Prince while they're asleep, or suffer periodic blackouts with no recollection of their actions. Perhaps their perceptions become mentally skewed until they don't realize their 'moral' actions they've taken are actually horrific – such as killing a dangerous cultist, only to realize they were blameless. What will the PC do when they discover they murdered an innocent, begging for their life? Maybe in doing the 'right thing,' the PCs' actions result in an abomination – spawning new and even worse horrors. Will they feel guilt and remorse? Or will they continue to feed their heart of darkness? As effective as this narrative technique can be, however, the GM must remain cautious in employing it as it effectively robs the players of agency.

CHAPTER 2

FOUNDATIONS OF DREAD

VERTIGO CLUTCHED MILES'S CHEST, SQUEEZING TIGHTER. NEON BLOOD splashed over the roof, accenting the rain-slicked mortar. Prismatic phantoms danced only steps away, beckoning. Yet, he refused the seductive lure of light and gravity, unwilling to approach the indistinct edge. Talia crouched there, as if hovering upon air and shadows. "Is this where Kenzie jumped?" he managed.

Talia snorted, "Where she fell. The police lied. I told you that." The words pained him. I can't be here, he thought. But he needed to know why his wife died. Talia suddenly tensed, pointing at the building across from them. "Don't move." Miles went to speak, but the question died in his throat. He saw it. There, as dark as calligraphy ink, spidery limbs like brushstrokes. An inelegant yawn revealed its bleached teeth. Then it grew still again, disappearing against the darkened background. But it was still there. Miles could feel its ancient hunger.

Talia slowly backed away from the edge, "Do you believe me now?" Miles nodded numbly. Talia smiled, "Good. Because you're going to help me kill that thing. For Kenzie."

OVERVIEW

Foundations of Dread further explores the Intrigue Map, examining the relationships between the player characters (PCs) and other narrative elements: hubs, links, Dark Secrets, and threats. This chapter also expands upon downtime and how to link together seemingly disparate arcs and stories. This chapter also introduces bombs and dramatic hooks, as well as ways to use them. The gamemaster (GM) should feel free to use one, some, or all of the tools provided here to create and maintain both short- and long-term campaigns.

THE INTRIGUE MAP

By design, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** inspires collaborative storytelling through the conversation, that is the game's freeform roleplaying experience. However, the most compelling conversations incorporate the connections between the PCs and significant plot elements. This narrative framework is represented by the ***Intrigue Map*** (*KDL*, p. 167). Through its hubs and links, the Intrigue Map provides the GM with a structure to maintain the conversation's overall progression, as well as allow established plot-threads to evolve during each session. This structural reference may become increasingly important for running long-term scenarios and campaigns, which frequently contain stories within stories, each narratively affecting the other.

The Intrigue Map also influences the conversation itself, revealing potential story arcs and subplots for the PCs. Its natural evolution also helps shape the group's ideas into one cohesive form, especially during downtime. Over time, the Intrigue Map will expand far beyond its original incarnation into the tangled web of a campaign (see ***Writing Campaigns***, p. 71).

Hubs

Representing plot points on the Intrigue Map, hubs narratively connect the PCs to one another and significant story elements. Be it directly or indirectly, they supplement and strengthen the overarching story, as well as outline its natural progression. In the first session, most hubs tie into the PCs' Dark Secrets and backgrounds. However, as the conversation progresses, certain hubs become more deeply woven into this web of connections and conspiracies, while others are ultimately resolved. In addition to the **PCs**, the standard hubs include important contacts, events, groups, leaders, monsters, places, objects, and organizations. Individual hub types are discussed more in-depth throughout this book.

As with a novel's subplots, the GM should treat hubs as wholly discrete narratives, which form the basis of important story arcs. They can serve as assets or obstacles for the PCs, helping or hindering their personal growth. These narratives also enhance the PCs' character development, allowing the GM to provide additional context and drama to events, introduce important story elements, and speed up or slow down the conversation as a whole. The more authentic and developed the hubs are, the more compelling and realistic the conversation becomes.

While hubs are highly diverse, they can usually be defined under one of three categories; *Complication*, *Connection*, and *Contrast*. These represent the hub's relationship with the overarching narrative and how the GM should manage its purpose within the Intrigue Map.

COMPLICATION

Complication hubs represent obstacles in the PCs' lives, most commonly reflecting external and internal threats tied to the PC's Dark Secret and Disadvantages. These aren't just groups, leaders, and monsters; potentially, any hub type could fall under this category with some imagination. Complications can be as subtle or overt as the conversation warrants, but should hold significance for the involved PC, thus pushing the player to eventually resolve these story arcs.

- **Contact**: The PC's brother is extremely financially successful, which triggers their ***Jealousy***. Although he remains helpful and loyal to them, their relationship frequently sours due to the PC's insecurities.
- **Event**: The PC ***Returned from the Other Side*** following an unusual building collapse. They must deal with the personal trauma caused by this event, as well as suspicious investigators and curious gawkers. Then, one rainy night, the twisted dead return to claim the survivors.
- **Group**: A hacking collective discovers the PC is ***Responsible for Medical Experiments***. Unless the PC meets the group's demands, they will release all documentation of the experiments, ruining the PC and putting them at risk of prosecution, imprisonment, and possibly even vigilantism.
- **Place**: The PC is tasked with being the ***Guardian*** of an ancient dolmen. They must appease the thing on the other side with tributes. The requests become more upsetting with every passing month, testing their morality and sanity.
- **Object**: The PC is the ***Heir*** of the *Salome Cube* – a living, severed head encased in lucite. Its unearthly presence drives those within a mile to violence within a lunar month. No matter how the PC tries to rid themselves of it, it always returns, smiling placidly at them.

CONNECTION

Connection hubs represent the PC's significant NPC relationships, usually with individuals or groups, including the PC's **Relations** (*KDL*, p. 170). If a PC has a deep emotional tie to an object or a place, then it may also be the subject of a connection hub. Story arcs for connection hubs can vary tremendously. However, unlike *complication* hubs, the main focus of connections are emotional intimacy and personal interaction.

- **Contact**: The ex-military doctor, and one of the PC's old flings, now runs her own private clinic across town. She stays in touch and fixes up the PC from time to time. Of course, she'll only do it if the injuries are interesting and the money is right.

- **Group**: A group of misfits and misanthropes, the Spirit-Talkers have effectively taken over the local pub, meeting there every night. Like the PC, most of them are victims of ***Visitations***, and believe the pub's cellar sometimes opens into another reality (it does).
- **Leader**: One of the PC's ***Street Contacts***, the ageless woman, lives in the city park. She offers sage advice to those who bring her fresh honeycomb and milk. She rules over the vagrants and runaways like a queen, holding court every solstice.
- **Monster**: The PC is a ***Survivor*** of childhood violence, and their imaginary friend murdered their abuser. The ancient entity has returned from Limbo, and wishes to resume protecting them from any threats.
- **Player Character**: The PCs worked together. While on a corporate trip, they witnessed the ritual murder of their colleague. This unsettling encounter has forever entangled their lives, as they deal with the consequences thereof, as ***Victims of Crime***.

CONTRAST

Contrast hubs represent plot points paralleling the main narrative and/or PC story arcs. These offer the players another perspective on the events their PCs experience, possibly even offering new opportunities. Contrast hubs provide the GM more narrative freedom to allude to vital plot information and foreshadow possible events to come, thus adding to player tension.

- **Event**: A dozen people disappear from the local trailer park, leaving only one comatose survivor behind. The mass ***Strange Disappearance*** mimics the PC's childhood trauma in disturbing ways. It triggers buried memories, driving him to dig deeper. Later in the conversation, the GM incorporates the survivor as another hub.
- **Leader**: The PC and his former classmate encountered something inhuman beneath the city, mentally scarring them with ***Forbidden Knowledge***. Recently, the roommate has had a meteoric rise in political power, after several competitors mysteriously quit or died.
- **Monster**: The PC encountered his doppelgänger, living the life he'd always dreamt of. He murdered it, but it didn't stay dead. Now, ***Guilty of a Crime***, the PC must deal with its machinations and watch it live his life from the outside.
- **Organization**: After his ***Occult Experience***, the PC recognizes the supernatural threats posed by his particle research. However, his previous funder, the Mayweather Foundation, has taken his findings and continued pushing the boundaries.
- **Player Character**: The PCs are both ***Chosen*** by the Daughter of Knives. One PC completely denies his destiny, resisting his cult's influence and refusing her gifts. The other plays the dangerous game of accepting her gifts, hoping to use them to eventually destroy the Forgotten God.

Links

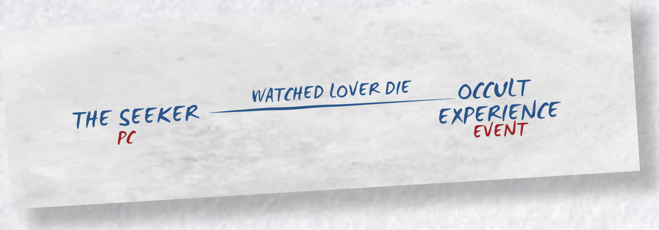
On the Intrigue Map, *links* represent the narrative threads connecting the various story hubs together. The GM should provide each link with brief descriptive tags, representing some story element, such as background information, character traits, motivations, Reactions, symbols, themes, etc. These descriptors depend on the link's purpose within the Intrigue Map, used to better define the relation between hubs. Furthermore, although the descriptor on the Intrigue Map may be brief, the GM and players are free to develop them, adding more complexity. In most cases, links fall under one of three definitions: *narrative*, *plot*, and *relationship*.

NARRATIVE LINKS

Narrative links bind two hubs together, possibly without the PC's knowledge. On the Intrigue Map, these are marked as narrative elements, such as past actions, experiences, and influences. However, narrative links cannot be further resolved, as they've already occurred. Be they emotional, mental, or physical, these plot elements create the narrative foundation upon which the story arc rests, influencing and shaping the PC and their world.

Depending on their defining statement, narrative links may act more like hubs, creating additional story arcs and indirectly affecting other connections and aspects in the PC's life.

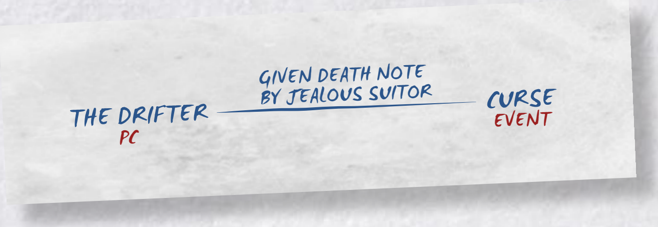
The Seeker watched his lover horribly killed by some monstrous entity during their ***Occult Experience***. On the Intrigue Map, this narrative link would appear, as follows:



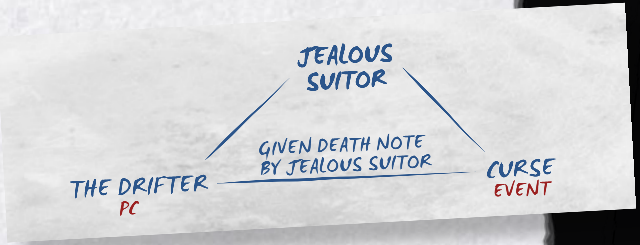
This traumatic experience prevents the PC from making intimate connections with other people, including his closest **Relation**. His continued secrecy about this incident has created additional stress on his relationship. As such, this narrative link could spawn a relationship link; connecting the PC, his **Relation**, and the ***Occult Experience*** on the Intrigue map. The GM may develop this connection further, be it through bombs, Moves, or Reactions. *What happens if the relation begins digging into the PC's mysterious past? What if he discover the horrible truth? What if something finds him first?*

Although the players contribute to developing narrative links, the GM ultimately controls and defines the link's true nature. The players may be unaware of how these links are actually connected to and define their PCs' lives. The GM should create story elements directly associated with the conjoined hubs, fleshing them out, as well as providing the context shared between them. In turn, these connected hubs offer perfect opportunities when developing new bombs, Moves, and Reactions, and even additional hubs/links.

The Drifter describes his **Curse** simply as, "*Been cursed with a death note.*" The GM secretly develops this into a *narrative* link, fleshing out its background influences. She decide the death note originated from the PC's former suitor, driven mad by their unrequited affections. As the story begins, the PC – and player – remains completely unaware of the **Curse's** true origins.


THE DRIFTER
PC
GIVEN DEATH NOTE BY JEALOUS SUITOR
CURSE
EVENT

Later in the story, the GM reintroduces the suitor into the character's life, adding them to the Intrigue Map as a new contact hub with links to the character and their Dark Secret. As the suitor becomes more integral to the conversation, the GM and player can further develop these new narrative links to define the previous relationship and the curse itself.

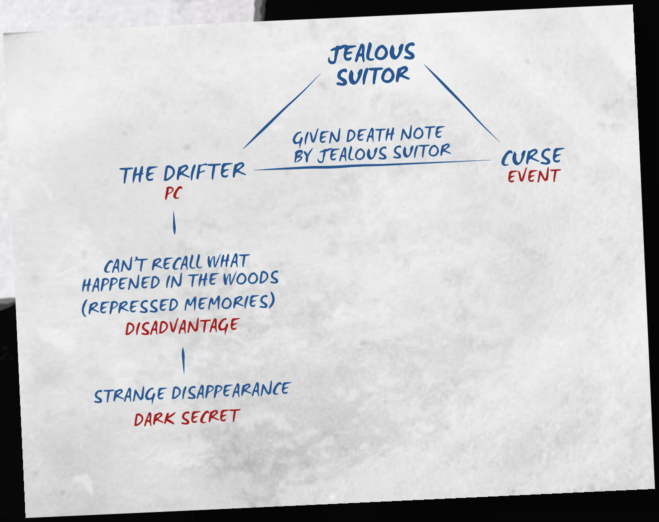

JEALOUS SUITOR
THE DRIFTER
PC
GIVEN DEATH NOTE BY JEALOUS SUITOR
CURSE
EVENT

PLOT LINKS

Plot links represent significant narrative elements that directly affect the Intrigue Map's hubs and its story arcs. By their nature, they are compelling forces within the conversation, motivating the connected hubs toward some form of narrative resolution. In most cases, they are directly tied to the PCs and story elements associated with their various backstories. Plot links continuously progress and evolve, creating potential challenges and worldly changes for the PCs. Supplementing the main storyline, these story arcs promote narrative depth and nuance.

Many plot links are also tied directly to the characters' Advantages, Dark Secrets, and Disadvantages. As such, these qualities can simply be added to the Intrigue Map, in conjunction with the link's descriptor. Combined, these represent the story arc and its background.

The PC's **Repressed Memories** are directly linked to the circumstances around the **Strange Disappearance** of his nephew. The player defines this link as, "*Can't recall what happened in the woods.*" On the Intrigue Map, the GM represents this as:

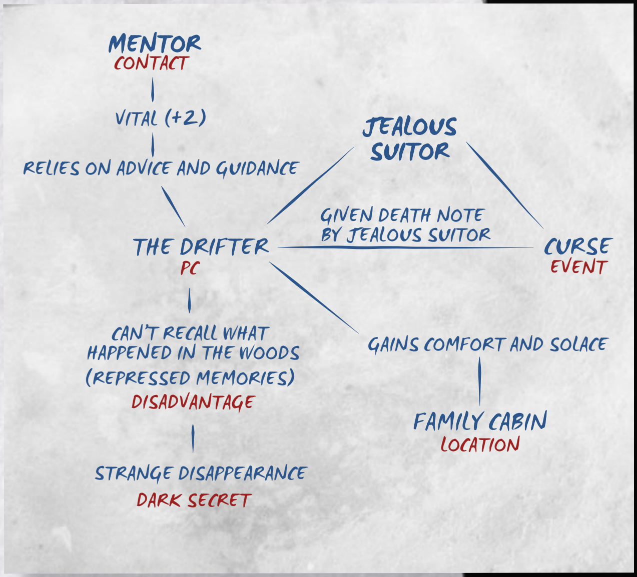

JEALOUS SUITOR
THE DRIFTER
PC
GIVEN DEATH NOTE BY JEALOUS SUITOR
CURSE
EVENT
CAN'T RECALL WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WOODS (REPRESSED MEMORIES)
DISADVANTAGE
STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE
DARK SECRET

Important plot links can become heavily intertwined throughout the Intrigue Map, looping back to the original hubs or connecting to new ones, as well as spawn additional narrative and relationship links. In this fashion, creative GMs and players can create entire narratives to produce complex and compelling stories.

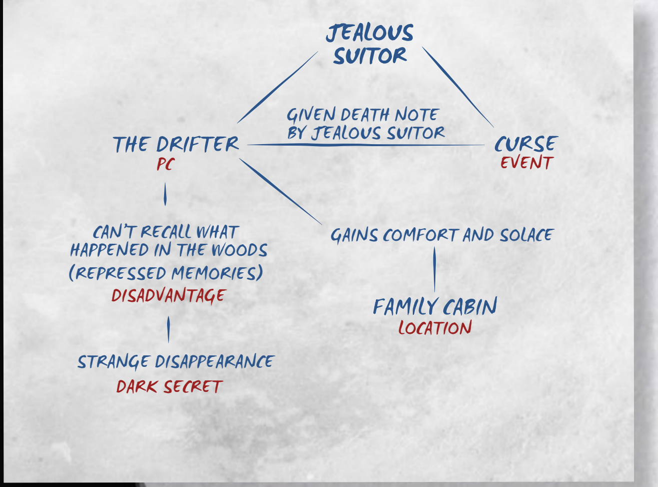
RELATIONSHIP LINKS

Relationship links define the connections between the PCs and each other, as well as major NPCs. These links also represent aspects of this emotional connection. As such, the links can also represent the PCs' more conceptual relationships, such as those with places and objects.

The PC's **family's cabin** provides him with *comfort and solace*, representing his intimate connection with the building and the land around it. He deeply cherish the location, and his emotional bond with it motivates his daily life. If threatened, this would have significant importance to the PC.



MENTOR
CONTACT
VITAL (+2)
RELIES ON ADVICE AND GUIDANCE
JEALOUS SUITOR
GIVEN DEATH NOTE BY JEALOUS SUITOR
THE DRIFTER
PC
CURSE
EVENT
CAN'T RECALL WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WOODS (REPRESSED MEMORIES)
DISADVANTAGE
GAINS COMFORT AND SOLACE
FAMILY CABIN
LOCATION
STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE
DARK SECRET



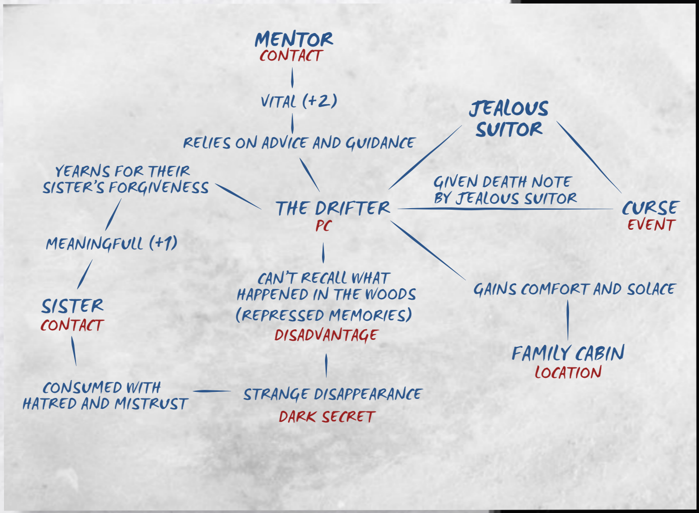
JEALOUS SUITOR
GIVEN DEATH NOTE BY JEALOUS SUITOR
THE DRIFTER
PC
CURSE
EVENT
CAN'T RECALL WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WOODS (REPRESSED MEMORIES)
DISADVANTAGE
GAINS COMFORT AND SOLACE
FAMILY CABIN
LOCATION
STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE
DARK SECRET

Additionally, relationship links can be unequal or change over time, depending on the associated character arcs. As with plot links, the GM does not need to reveal all aspects of each relationship link to the player immediately. She simply record the dual links and assign descriptors to both on the Intrigue Map.

The PC with ***Repressed Memories*** yearns for his sister's forgiveness, struggling to discover what actually happened during the ***Strange Disappearance*** of his nephew. However, his sister (**Meaningful +1**) is *consumed with hatred and mistrust*, and believes the PC is responsible for the ***Strange Disappearance***. She's secretly plotting to avenge her son's death and developing into an adversary, without the player's knowledge.

Relationship links can also help the GM keep track of the PCs' **Relations** on the ***Intrigue Map*** (p. 47). In addition to recording the link's descriptor, the GM also includes the relationship's social strength (*neutral*, *meaningful*, or *vital*). Similarly, as the story progresses and the PCs' relationship hubs/links intensify, the GM can modify the links to signify their evolution into true **Relations**.

Over the years, *The Drifter* has maintained an intimate relationship with his mentor **(Vital +2)**. *Whenever he need advice*, he go to her, as she is the only person he trust. Indeed, without her council, the PC would fully succumb to his worst impulses.



MENTOR
CONTACT
VITAL (+2)
RELIES ON ADVICE AND GUIDANCE
JEALOUS SUITOR
YEARNS FOR THEIR SISTER'S FORGIVENESS
THE DRIFTER
PC
GIVEN DEATH NOTE BY JEALOUS SUITOR
CURSE
EVENT
MEANINGFULL (+1)
CAN'T RECALL WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WOODS (REPRESSED MEMORIES)
DISADVANTAGE
GAINS COMFORT AND SOLACE
SISTER
CONTACT
FAMILY CABIN
LOCATION
CONSUMED WITH HATRED AND MISTRUST
STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE
DARK SECRET

Keeping It All Together

When managing the Intrigue Map, the GM must remember its fundamental structure relies upon story arcs, represented by the hubs and links. As with episodic storytelling, these story arcs progress along with the main conversation, adding depth and nuance to the campaign. More importantly, they help define and expand the PCs' narratives, deepening player investment, as they directly contribute to these story arcs through the conversation.

PROMOTE NARRATIVE CONNECTIVITY

From the first session, the Intrigue Map develops alongside the PCs and their Dark Secrets (*KDL*, p. 167). As the shared story evolves, the players and the GM add new hubs and links, representing newly established connections, events, and threats. Whenever possible, the GM and players should interlink these narrative arcs between several PCs, providing additional plot points and opportunities to interact. This helps enrich the conversation and allow everyone to participate in the collaborative process.

For example, *The Artist* (**Pact with Dark Forces**) and *The Prophet* (**Guardian**) are linked together via their mutual connection to **Rebecca** – an aspiring philosophy student. This singular connection potentially provides numerous character interactions:

- Rebecca's affections for **The Artist** are intensifying, and she wants their relationship to become more than platonic.
- **The Artist** also wants a relationship with Rebecca, but remains standoffish, afraid that their supernatural tormentor (**Pact with Dark Forces**) wants to possess her.
- Rebecca considers **The Prophet** to be her mentor, but feels nothing beyond this.
- **The Prophet** is secretly protecting Rebecca (**Guardian**) and falling in love with him.
- **The Artist** knows **The Prophet** is hunting his demonic tormentor, but he's too afraid to reveal the truth.
- **The Prophet** wants to help **The Artist** rediscover his faith, but his jealousy over Rebecca clouds his judgement.

Each of these relationships can be expanded into a story arc, supplementing the conversation. They can also tie the PCs together via additional hubs and links, such as *The Artist's* demon [Hub: Monster], which *The Prophet* seeks to destroy [Link: *Must stop demon*].

With each additional character involved, the potential number of connections expands, as each engenders new dynamic relationships. Continuing the previous example, *The Veteran* is connected to **Rebecca** as she oversees his rehabilitation [Link: **Nightmares**]. As such, this potentially connects them with *The Artist* and *The Prophet*, creating unique relationships with both. In turn, these further strengthen the group's character bonds and interactions.

This interconnectivity promotes balanced and dynamic character development and encourages new story threads. Although the GM does not need to detail every potential connection, this lays the narrative groundwork for their potential incorporation into later stories.

MAINTAINING NARRATIVE CONTROL

In contrast, while the Intrigue Map promotes character and narrative development, it can potentially weaken the story structure holding the conversation together. Left unchecked, the Intrigue Map can devolve into a convoluted web of meandering threads and dead ends, creating confusion and frustration for the GM and the players.

Although the GM may be tempted to weave several hubs into the Intrigue Map, she must remember these additional layers of complexity may inadvertently detract from the story she want to tell. In short, the Intrigue Map must complement the conversation, not compete with it for center stage. Generally speaking, the GM should only allow two to three personal arcs per PC at any one time; even less in larger gaming groups. Introducing more may detract in several different ways, including:

- The Intrigue Map becomes increasingly convoluted and difficult to maintain.
- The story arcs lose importance, obscuring one another until they fade into the background.
- Time constraints ultimately deny players equal time in the spotlight.

As discussed above, the GM and players should frame the Intrigue Map's story arcs so they turn back in on one another, rather than away. Not only does this create narrative connectivity, but helps maintain control and coherency.

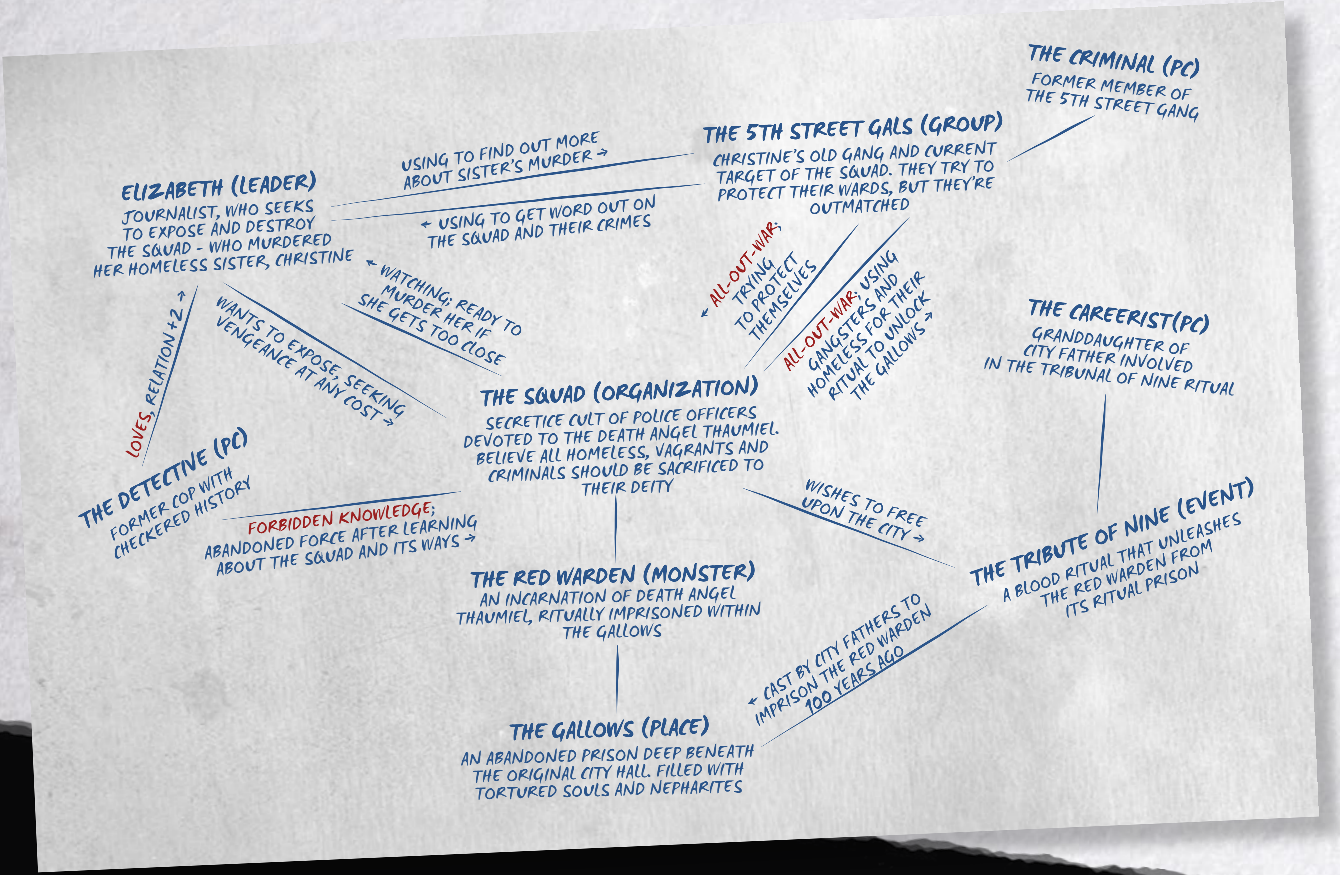
Using Alternative Structures

Depending on the stories the group wishes to tell, the GM and players can adopt alternative structures for their Intrigue Map. The standard ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** design is *character-centric*, where the hubs and links develop out of the character's personal stories. This makes for an intimate and personal roleplaying experience. However, the GM may adopt more traditional plot-centric formats, where the Intrigue Map expands from key story elements, while the PCs remain on the exterior. This approach may be more conducive with previous incarnations of ***KULT*** and larger campaigns, such as ***Taroticum*** and ***The Black Madonna***. However, as this approach shifts narrative focus toward the GM, she must be prepared to adjust the conversation accordingly.

PLOT-BASED STRUCTURE

A *plot-based structure* makes the story itself the Intrigue Map's narrative focus. In many ways, this style parallels more traditional roleplaying games, where the Map's structure revolves around its central plot. Each outward link is connected to important story elements, such as events, places, and NPCs. In turn, the PCs are connected to one or more of these plot hubs, as well as to each other. As the conversation progresses, the PCs work toward resolving the central hub's story arcs. However, their personal character arcs remain supplemental to this narrative progression.

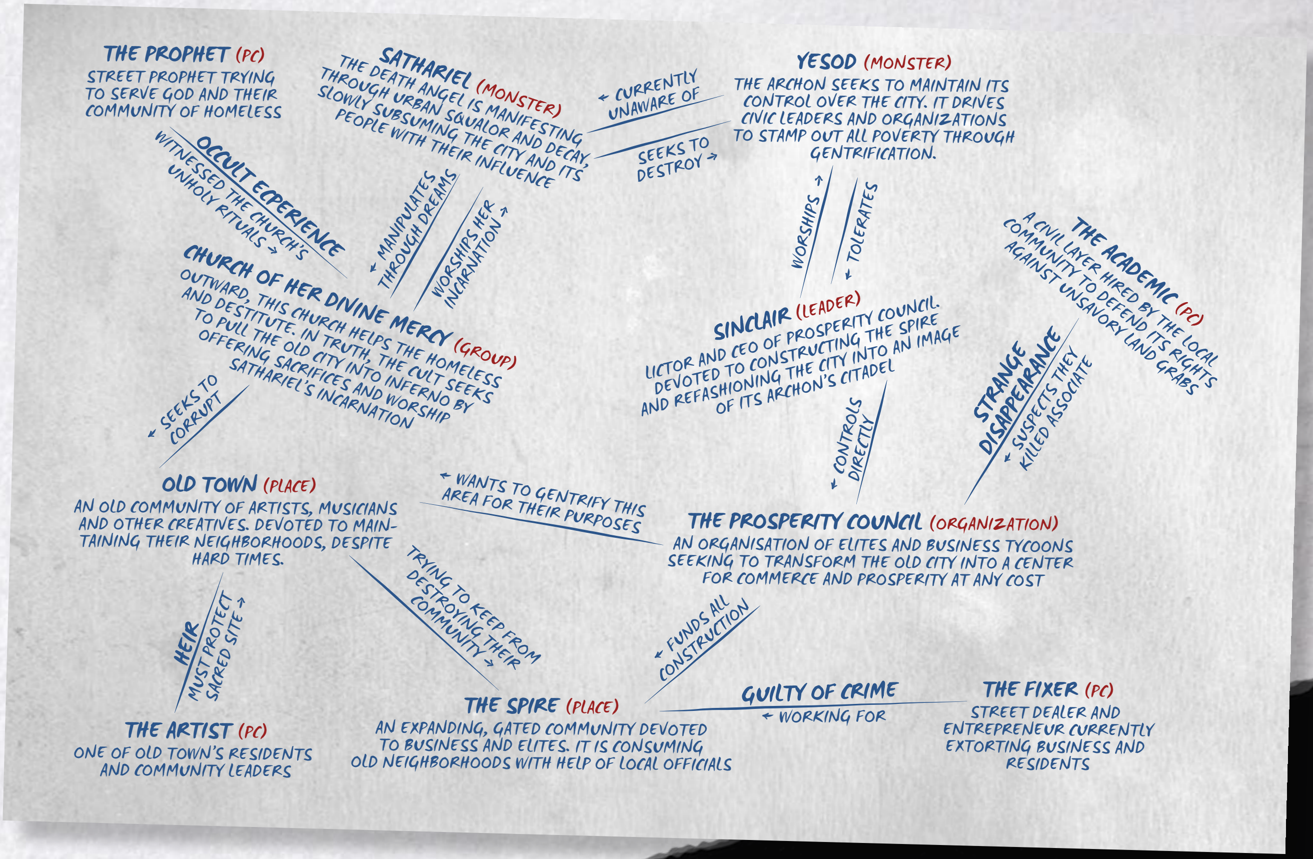
While vital to the narrative, the PCs effectively become story elements within the Intrigue Map, rather than its prime motivators. This format makes plot-based Intrigue Maps well-suited to one-shot scenarios and shorter campaigns.


THE CRIMINAL (PC)
FORMER MEMBER OF THE 5TH STREET GANG
THE 5TH STREET GALS (GROUP)
CHRISTINE'S OLD GANG AND CURRENT TARGET OF THE SQUAD. THEY TRY TO PROTECT THEIR WARDS, BUT THEY'RE OUTMATCHED
ELIZABETH (LEADER)
JOURNALIST, WHO SEEKS TO EXPOSE AND DESTROY THE SQUAD - WHO MURDERED HER HOMELESS SISTER, CHRISTINE
USING TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT SISTER'S MURDER →
← USING TO GET WORD OUT ON THE SQUAD AND THEIR CRIMES
← WATCHING; READY TO MURDER HER IF SHE GETS TOO CLOSE
WANTS TO EXPOSE, SEEKING VENGEANCE AT ANY COST →
LOVES, RELATION +2 →
← ALL-OUT-WAR; TRYING TO PROTECT THEMSELVES
ALL-OUT-WAR; USING GANGSTERS AND HOMELESS FOR THEIR RITUAL TO UNLOCK THE GALLOWS →
THE CAREERIST(PC)
GRANDDAUGHTER OF CITY FATHER INVOLVED IN THE TRIBUNAL OF NINE RITUAL
THE SQUAD (ORGANIZATION)
SECRETICE CULT OF POLICE OFFICERS DEVOTED TO THE DEATH ANGEL THAUMIEL. BELIEVE ALL HOMELESS, VAGRANTS AND CRIMINALS SHOULD BE SACRIFICED TO THEIR DEITY
THE DETECTIVE (PC)
FORMER COP WITH CHECKERED HISTORY
FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE; ABANDONED FORCE AFTER LEARNING ABOUT THE SQUAD AND ITS WAYS →
WISHES TO FREE UPON THE CITY →
THE TRIBUTE OF NINE (EVENT)
A BLOOD RITUAL THAT UNLEASHES THE RED WARDEN FROM ITS RITUAL PRISON
THE RED WARDEN (MONSTER)
AN INCARNATION OF DEATH ANGEL THAUMIEL, RITUALLY IMPRISONED WITHIN THE GALLOWS
← CAST BY CITY FATHERS TO IMPRISON THE RED WARDEN 100 YEARS AGO
THE GALLOWS (PLACE)
AN ABANDONED PRISON DEEP BENEATH THE ORIGINAL CITY HALL. FILLED WITH TORTURED SOULS AND NEPHARITES

INFLUENCE-BASED STRUCTURE

An *influenced-based structure* places the Higher Powers at the heart of the Intrigue Map, while the PCs remain on the periphery. The main hubs and links extend from each Higher Power, defining their conspiracies and machinations throughout the game world. Their conflicts and interactions shape the ever-evolving Intrigue Map, including plot elements under their control, such as leaders, organizations, and place. During the conversation, these plot threads touch upon the PCs' personal narratives, be it directly or indirectly. As the game progresses, the characters are drawn deeper into the main story, where their personal experiences are explored and accentuate the overall plot line.

Effectively, the PCs are participants within a grander story, rather than being the prime motivators. While their actions may have profound consequences, they remain peripheral to the Higher Powers' desires and goals. This makes influence-based Intrigue Maps conducive to large campaigns with extensive plot threads and story arcs.



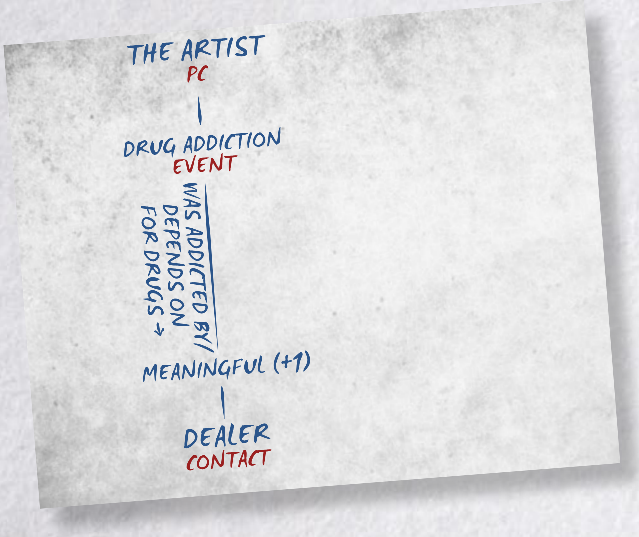
THE PROPHET (PC)
STREET PROPHET TRYING TO SERVE GOD AND THEIR COMMUNITY OF HOMELESS
SATHARIEL (MONSTER)
THE DEATH ANGEL IS MANIFESTING THROUGH URBAN SQUALOR AND DECAY, SLOWLY SUBSUMING THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE WITH THEIR INFLUENCE
← CURRENTLY UNAWARE OF
SEEKS TO DESTROY →
YESOD (MONSTER)
THE ARCHON SEEKS TO MAINTAIN ITS CONTROL OVER THE CITY. IT DRIVES CIVIC LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO STAMP OUT ALL POVERTY THROUGH GENTRIFICATION.
OCCULT ECPERIENCE
WITNESSED THE CHURCH'S UNHOLY RITUALS →
← MANIPULATES THROUGH DREAMS
WORSHIPS HER INCARNATION →
WORSHIPS →
← TOLERATES
CHURCH OF HER DIVINE MERCY (GROUP)
OUTWARD, THIS CHURCH HELPS THE HOMELESS AND DESTITUTE. IN TRUTH, THE CULT SEEKS TO PULL THE OLD CITY INTO INFERNO BY OFFERING SACRIFICES AND WORSHIP SATHARIEL'S INCARNATION
THE ACADEMIC (PC)
A CIVIL LAYER HIRED BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TO DEFEND ITS RIGHTS AGAINST UNSAVORY LAND GRABS
SINCLAIR (LEADER)
LICTOR AND CEO OF PROSPERITY COUNCIL. DEVOTED TO CONSTRUCTING THE SPIRE AND REFASHIONING THE CITY INTO AN IMAGE OF ITS ARCHON'S CITADEL
← SEEKS TO CORRUPT
STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE
← SUSPECTS THEY KILLED ASSOCIATE
← CONTROLS DIRECTLY
OLD TOWN (PLACE)
AN OLD COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS, MUSICIANS AND OTHER CREATIVES. DEVOTED TO MAINTAINING THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS, DESPITE HARD TIMES.
← WANTS TO GENTRIFY THIS AREA FOR THEIR PURPOSES
THE PROSPERITY COUNCIL (ORGANIZATION)
AN ORGANISATION OF ELITES AND BUSINESS TYCOONS SEEKING TO TRANSFORM THE OLD CITY INTO A CENTER FOR COMMERCE AND PROSPERITY AT ANY COST
TRYING TO KEEP FROM DESTROYING THEIR COMMUNITY →
HEIR
MUST PROTECT SACRED SITE →
← FUNDS ALL CONSTRUCTION
GUILTY OF CRIME
← WORKING FOR
THE FIXER (PC)
STREET DEALER AND ENTREPRENEUR CURRENTLY EXTORTING BUSINESS AND RESIDENTS
THE ARTIST (PC)
ONE OF OLD TOWN'S RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
THE SPIRE (PLACE)
AN EXPANDING, GATED COMMUNITY DEVOTED TO BUSINESS AND ELITES. IT IS CONSUMING OLD NEIGHBORHOODS WITH HELP OF LOCAL OFFICIALS

EVENTS

Events are one of the most versatile hubs on the Intrigue Map, usually representing significant moments in the PCs' lives (*KDL*, p. 167), such as their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages. More individualized events can also be tied to personal drives, shaping how they progress over time, as well as alter the PCs themselves. They can also represent threats and plot points that influence the overall story, either in the past, present, or future. As such, events are vital narrative components in long-term campaigns (see ***Writing Campaigns***, p. 71).

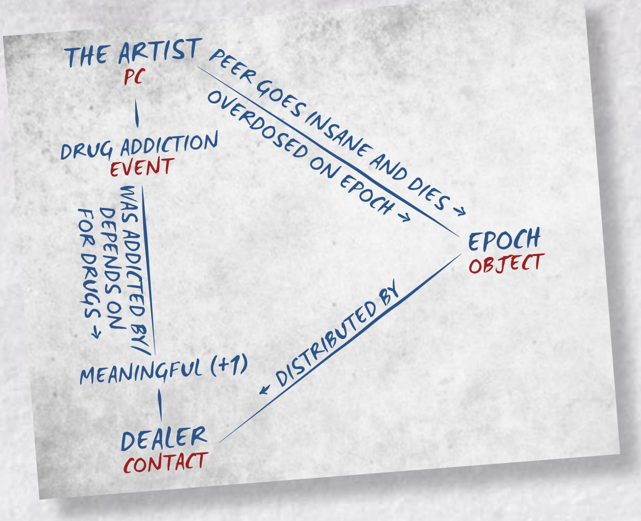
As the main story progresses, events may create links between important hubs, representing how these interactions occurred. Much like subplots, events can involve completely separate storylines, NPCs, and other narrative elements, each connected to various aspects of the Intrigue Map. Typically, they're associated with the PCs and their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages.

The Artist is connected to an NPC drug dealer, who supplies their **Drug Addiction**. The PC is unaware that the dealer purposefully got him hooked on heroin, in order to control him. Narratively, this event hub ties his character threads together. On the Intrigue Map, it appears as:



Events can transpire over one scene or require entire sessions to ultimately resolve, which, in turn, may spawn additional narrative hubs and links. As such, when developing events, the GM should look beyond the superficial and expand the underlying facets of each one, individually. While it's not necessary to completely flesh out event hubs prior to play, the GM should develop basic details to progress from. As discussed above, narratively linking event hubs back to existing story elements further strengthens the Intrigue Map and maintains coherence.

During the campaign, *The Artist's* dealer becomes involved with the new drug, *Epoch*. Refined from angelic seminal fluids, the drug drives people into lustful trances. One of *The Artist's* peers overdoses and goes violently insane, masturbating himself bloody before dying. Horrified, the player decides to stop this drug, creating another story arc for the PC. On the Intrigue Map, this new thread appears as:



Due to their varied and ever-changing nature, events can be complicated for the GM to employ without prior planning. As such, the GM is encouraged to outline significant events in advance. Typically, this is done during downtime, as the GM expands and develops the progressing narrative. In turn, these event hubs can inspire future bombs and Dramatic Hooks, providing the GM ample opportunities to enhance the conversation.

Event Types

Event hubs are varied and unique, each representing multifaceted character and story arcs within the conversation. However, most event hubs can be defined under a specific event type, which reflect common themes and tropes in cinema and literature. In essence, each type represents the event hub's plot, outlining its story elements and narrative progression. Each event type is also defined by common qualities, reflected by three characteristics: *Connection*, *Resolution*, and *Unique Moves*. Optionally, the GM may also wish to incorporate event themes, providing each event hub with additional nuance (see insert on p. 57).

Connections represent common qualities that tie the event hub into the Intrigue Map and directly/indirectly affect the PCs' lives. These are typically represented by Advantages, Disadvantages, and Dark Secrets. However, the GM is free to utilize defining plots, instead, such as *Yearns for an Impossible Love*.

Resolutions are the narrative pathways for an event to be overcome and/or resolved on the Intrigue Map. However, resolution does not mean concluded. The resolution may even branch off additional story threads.

Unique Moves are suggested GM Moves to be used when PCs address these events during game-play. While these Moves are characteristic of each event type, they are by no means the only possibilities available to the GM.

Finally, the GM is free to use these archetypal event types as inspiration when designing scenarios. Each classification offers plenty of opportunities for development into intricate, full-length storylines and branching narratives.

HUNTED/LIBERATE

In *Hunted* events, the PCs find themselves chased by an antagonist or antagonistic force, and the plot focuses on their escape. Being caught holds extreme consequences for the PCs, and the pursuers are relentless, creating rising tension as the hunt progresses. Reasons for the pursuit should be tied to the PCs, but can also be personal to the pursuers, or indiscriminate in nature. Resolving the hunt requires various resolutions, such as proving one's innocence or killing the pursuers.

In *Liberate* events, the PCs must either rescue someone or escape from confinement, incarceration, or persecution. Typically, an outside force imposes this captivity, such as an antagonist, setting, or situation. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, this event could also involve different forms of imprisonment, such as physical, mental, and/or spiritual. Such stories could include the victim being trapped by self-imposed circumstances, such as their desires or madness. Once the PCs escape, the event may transform into the *Hunt* event, as the captors seek to reimpose their will.

Connection: Chosen One, Curse, Guilty of Crime, Occult Experience, Responsible for Medical Experiments, Nemesis, Returned from the Other Side, Rootless, Stalker, Victim of Crime/Medical Experiments.

Resolution: Both *Hunt/Liberate* events are resolved once the PCs escape their situation or succumb to it. Depending on the consequences of this resolution, the event can evolve into another story/character arc.

Unique Moves: Block a path, Open a door, Rob someone, Rend the Illusion, Influence creature/person, Manipulate the surrounding environment, Incite hatred in someone, Harm someone, Demand sacrifice, Ruin something by defiling it, Drive someone insane

- Upon ***Returning from the Other Side***, the PC is *hunted* by an unknown force. It haunts their dreams and eventually bleeds into the physical world, slowly driving them insane. As the event progresses, they discover the pursuing entity laid claim to them, and intends to drag them back into the Mirror Halls for some terrible purpose.
- A ***Victim of Medical Experiments*** discovers those responsible have resumed human testing. Innocent people are enduring hideous torments. The PC can *liberate* these victims from the medical facility, but only at great risk to themselves. Can they live with knowing and not acting?

MYSTERY

A *Mystery* event requires the PCs to solve an enigma, puzzle, or mystery. This usually requires them to collect clues and information to unlock the truth. Most mysteries start with a hook – a smaller event that draws the PC's attention. As the event progresses, more threads come to light, drawing the PC invariably deeper into the mystery itself.

Because players are frequently attracted to problem-solving, the mystery event's solution should promote their cleverness and curiosity, but without them becoming frustrated. If the players run into problems, the GM can reveal the solution through her PCs, allowing ***Investigate***, ***Crime Scene Investigator***, or similar rolls to advance the plot.

Connection: Curse, Family Secret, Forbidden Knowledge, Occult Experience, Repressed Memories, Returned from the Other Side, Strange Disappearances, Visitations.

Resolution: The mystery's main solution is revealed. Resolutions can tie up the mystery in a neat little bow, or can instead kick off another event.

Unique Moves: Reveal exposition, Offer guidance, Unveil a secret, Disclose facts about reality, Rend the Illusion, Show another dimension, Send a vision.

- After drifting away emotionally, the PC's closest confidante goes missing (***Strange Disappearance***). Shortly thereafter, the PC receives their friend's journal via courier. The book reveals an underworld of dark passions, illicit drugs, and unnatural rituals involving prominent academics. The final entry simply says: "*I Am Afraid*."

REVELATION

In *Revelation* events, the character strives to discover something important, such as vital information or answers. However, unlike the *Mystery* event, the narrative focuses on the PC's *self-discovery*, and the personal consequences thereof. In essence, the event isn't about the outcome of the search, but what they learn about themselves in the process.

Typically, revelation events begin with a moment of crisis, which shocks the PC out of his status quo. As he resolve this crisis, the person he were beforehand is altered – for better or worse. Once the revelation is achieved, he is left to examine who he were, who he is now, and his new perception of the world. In turn, this self-discovery can create additional hubs and/or links on the Intrigue Map. The GM can continue the revelation event throughout the campaign, as the PC discovers new aspects of himself and the world he thought he knew. For this reason, revelation events are intimately tied to Dark Secrets.

Connection: Curse, Family Secret, Forbidden Knowledge, Repressed Memories, Mental Compulsion, Nightmares.

Resolution: Revelation events are resolved once the PC achieves a form of enlightenment, and is inherently changed by this discovery.

Unique Moves: Defile a memory, Disclose facts about character, Expose uncomfortable truth, Hide character's past, Offer guidance, Reveal prophecy or exposition, Send a dream/vision, Unveil a secret

- A PC with ***Repressed Memories*** discovers faded photographs of the childhood he don't remember (*moment of crisis*). Digging deeper into his past, he discover he killed his older sister to protect his mother. Upon this revelation, he realize his inherent mistrust of people stems from this incident. He begin reevaluating his standoffish nature. The GM links the older sister to this event, deciding she'll return later in the campaign as a Purgatide.

RIVALRY

Rivalry events involve the conflict between two characters, Influences, or organizations – even the Higher Powers. This high-stakes competition should be relatively balanced, even if the competitors' Advantages and resources are completely different. The rivalry may involve the PC directly or indirectly, depending on the nature of the conflict.

If the rivalry directly involves the PC, the opposing threat should continually hold the high ground, as this promotes continuous tension in the story. If the rivalry indirectly involves the PC, he is affected by the actions of the opposing threat, usually through his **Relations**. Another form of rivalry event involves the PC trapped between the competing forces, simply trying not to die in the crossfire.

Connection: Competitor, Guardian, Harassed, Jealousy, Marked, Nemesis, Oath of Revenge, Victim of Crime.

Resolution: Rivalry events progress through several stages of conflict, adding tension with every step. Finally, the event climaxes in a final conflict, determining which side wins.

Unique Moves: Block a path, Steal something important, Destroy something/someone, Harm someone important, Incite violence, Violate something/someone, Demand sacrifice.

- A ***Guardian*** character protects his troubled loved one, who can ***See Through the Illusion***. The loved one's brother accuses the PC of failing at his duties and being unable to protect his sister. He begins attacking the PC, tearing down the PCs livelihood, and trying to win his sister back. As the event progresses, the PC recognizes the brother's true – and nefarious – intentions toward her.

SEARCH

Search events require the PCs locate some item, such as an object, location, and/or person to fulfill their ultimate goal. However, unlike revelation events, the item remains the narrative's focus rather than the PCs' emotional growth. Whenever possible, the item should have some parallel to the PCs' life, creating additional investment and tension. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, search events typically involve the characters' Dark Secrets or aspects of the True Reality, such as artifacts, creatures, Metropolis, or the Higher Powers.

Typically, search events follow the same narrative progression: 1) the character learns of the item's existence/importance, 2) they follow clues pointing toward the item, and 3) they overcome various obstacles and threats until finally finding the item – usually encountering some final opposition. A common threat involves the PCs preventing other Influences from obtaining the item first, adding additional pressure to their search.

Connection: Family Secret, Forbidden Knowledge, Heir, Object of Desire, Occult Experience, Strange Disappearance, Victim of Crime.

Resolution: After prolonged struggle, the PCs obtain the item – or lose it forever. They must choose how to utilize the item; perhaps producing another hub/link.

Unique Moves: Reveal knowledge, Hide something, Block a path, Open a door, Offer guidance, Steal an item, Unveil a secret, Incite Desire, Defile an item, Send a vision.

- A character's ***Family Secret*** revolves around paperwork, photographs, and recordings from an formerly unassuming and uninteresting family member. They reveal surgical experiments to unlock a patient's subconscious – most resulting in traumatic brain injuries and death. However, many of the actual documented results remain missing and someone is convinced the character has them. This ***Stalker*** is willing to maim or kill the character to get at the knowledge.

TEMPTATION/ WRETCHED EXCESS

In *Temptation* events, the PC is lured by something that tests his ethics and morality. The narrative explores the PC's dilemma and how this temptation affects his life. Temptations can be internal or external in nature, as well as mundane and/or supernatural in origin. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, many temptation events originate from the various Principles, as the Higher Powers twist and reshape the person.

In *Wretched Excess* events, the PC has *already succumbed* to the temptation and is now suffering repercussions. These negative effects resonate throughout his personal life and the world around him, destroying who he were. As such, the GM and player should develop the PC's life prior to this event, preferably through play. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, this tragedy is a special kind of hell as psychological and physical damage thins the Illusion and attracts the forces beyond.

Connection: Chosen One, Forbidden Knowledge, Guilty of Crime, Heir, Responsible for Medical Experiments, Drug Addict, Greedy, Jealousy, Liar, Mental Compulsion, Object of Desire, Obsession, Sexual Neurosis, Victim of Passion.

Resolution: *Temptation* events resolve when the PC resists the temptation or succumbs to it. Wretched Excess events resolve when the PC either overcomes his fall from grace or is ultimately destroyed by it.

Unique Moves: Reveal exposition, Block a path, Open a door, Rob someone of something, Incite desire, Defile something, Change a state of being, Show another dimension, Rend the Illusion, Drive someone insane

- An ***Heir*** discovers his family's influence stems from its intimate connection to a death cult. This legacy offers him power and wealth, but he must engage in cannibalistic rituals and black magic. Can he resist the *temptation* of continuing the family traditions? Or will he succumb to the seductive whispers of Inferno?
- The PC is ***Responsible for Medical Experiments***, pushing the boundaries of ethical behavior to cure Parkinson's Disease. In his wretched excess, he's inflicted grotesque mutations and massive emotional trauma on patients. While he's made important advances in his research, how far is he willing to go? What price is he willing to pay?

TRANSMUTATION/ TRANSFIGURATION

In the *Transmutation* event, the PC undergoes some type of *physical* transformation and is forced to deal with becoming something else. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, this warping and destruction of self may stem from numerous sources, including the PC's own fractured mind. The event itself focuses on how the character deals with the transmutation and its resulting difficulties. Transformation is discussed at length in ***New Flesh, Ancient Desires*** (p. 192.

In contrast, *Transfiguration* events focus on the PC's mental transformation, usually ascending to a higher state. By suffering and overcoming obstacles, he become enlightened and recovered part of his divinity. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, transfigurations are associated with Disadvantages or Dark Secrets, showing how the PC matures and overcomes his personal issues. The event follows the PC's spiritual journey from who he was into someone new, as well as how that transfiguration affects him and those around him.

Connection: Chosen One, Curse, Forbidden Knowledge, Mental Illness, Occult Experience, Returned from the Other Side, Victim of Medical Experiments, Visitations, Experiment Gone Wrong, Guilt, Haunted, Marked, Oath of Revenge, Phobia, Sexual Neurosis.

Resolution: *Transformation* events are resolved when the PC's physical metamorphosis consumes him, evolves him, or is cured. *Transfiguration* events are resolved when the PC faces his enlightenment, either embracing it or rejecting it. In both events, the resolution can lead to additional hubs/links, as the PC is no longer the person he once were – and will never be again.

Unique Moves: Reveal prophecy, Block a path, Open a door, Change their Flesh, Change their Mind, Offer guidance, Defile their Flesh, Destroy their Self-Image, Reveal reality, Tear the Illusion, Incite new desires, Drive the character insane, Send a vision.

- A **Chosen One's** destiny is to become the vessel for a Forgotten God. His *transmutation* begins, slowly mutating his body into the god's horrific image and overwhelming him with alien desires. He must deal with his stolen flesh, as well as the God's minions who want to assure the divinity's return.
- A PC suffering from ***Guilt*** is provided the opportunity for redemption. Through this *transfiguration*, he must acknowledge the terrible truth of who he are and the pain his actions have caused. This revelation progresses beyond his guilt, as he must mature, lest he repeat his crimes.

Event Themes

In addition to assigning them types, the GM can make their event hubs more distinctive and nuanced by also incorporating narrative *themes*. To do so, they assign an *Influence* to the event type, reflecting how one of the main Principles affects its story arc (*KDL*, p. 178). Note, although *Influences* are associated with specific Higher Powers, they do not need to appear in the story. The GM simply reflects the Principle's associated themes, which can dramatically alter how each event type is narratively presented and resolved.

In the examples below, note how the ***Wretched Excess*** event type changes, simply by adding different themes.

The Downward Spiral [Wretched Excess/Exclusion]: *The Addict's* pursuit of their high has pushed everyone away. They're no longer trusted, even by their **Relations**. Shunned and alone, they feed their addiction to ease the pain,cutting themselves off even more. It's only then the thing behind the mirror starts whispering to them, offering to ease their pain.

The Long Road [Wretched Excess/Honor]: While indulging in their excess, the PC previously harmed an innocent (***Guilty of Crime***). This tragedy led to their moment of clarity. They swore they'd make things right, no matter the consequences. However, their grave misdeeds and constant desires are not so easily remedied.

Forsaking Grace [Wretched Excess/Community]: For years, the PC lived as the *Chosen One* of a Passion cult. They indulged in unspeakable acts, pushing the limits of sensuality. Although the PC recognizes the cult's dark purpose, the sense of family and security the sect offers is highly addictive.

For further inspiration on combining event types/themes, refer to the *Threat Charts* listed in *Book Three: Broken Reflections.* Each chapter provides event hubs archetypal of their thematic genre.

BOMBS

Bombs are unexpected moments of crisis that test the PCs, open new hubs and links, and increase player tension (*KDL*, p. 174). Unlike GM Moves, bombs are usually pre-planned, usually with an individual PC (or PCs) in mind. There are no 'wrong' resolutions, but the bomb's consequences can be far-reaching, depending on how the character responds to it. Bombs also differ from **Dramatic Hooks** (see below), as their introduction into the story remains outside the player's agency.

It should be noted that bombs are meant to *enhance* the narrative, not to derail or constrain it. Nor should the GM present them in an adversarial manner; otherwise, the players may consider them to be unfair punishments. Bombs aren't random bad luck and misfortunes. They're narrative opportunities for the player to truly see what their PC is made of, testing their resolve and resources.

Building the Better Bomb

When building bombs, remember they never have predetermined conclusions, as their outcomes are dependent on how the players react to them. As such, the GM may also wish to prepare some questions to ask when the bomb is triggered during the conversation.

Depending on the story's themes, the best bombs stem from one of the following narrative conflicts:

- **Conflict with Self** – the PC struggles against his own ethics and nature;
- **Conflict with Others** – the PC struggles against another character;
- **Conflict with Society** – the PC struggles against societal rules and customs;
- **Conflict with Supernatural** – the PC struggles against the Illusion.

Conflicts should be tied to the PC's Dark Secret or Disadvantages. They don't have to be, but the best bombs test what a PC is made of. The GM can take her time adjusting the bombs accordingly, perfecting them so they carry maximum emotional resonance. However, more experienced GMs are free to improvise and include bombs according to the scenario's progression. Effective bombs usually complement the targeted PC, as well as the narrative's themes and atmosphere. Bombs associated with the ***Broken Reflections*** (p. 232) are also included for inspiration.

DILEMMA BOMB

This is the archetypical bomb, which narratively places the PC 'between a rock and a hard place,' forcing him to make an impossible choice. This is the ultimate test of his convictions and personality, conflicting with his faith, morals, and obligations. The dilemma can also be used to further reveal the story's theme, the antagonist's nature, and, of course, the PCs themselves.

- **Self**: The PC gains an opportunity to complete his goal, but must sacrifice his worldview to do so. Which is more important to him?
- **Others**: The PC's **Relation** seeks vengeance against their questionable contact. Does the PC allow them to carry through with their plan or protect the contact's life, knowing they'd destroy the **Relation's** last chance for justice?
- **Society**: The PC knows that assisting the radical Guardians of the Earth will likely result in acts of ecoterrorism, but they desperately need access to portals the group created, leading into Gaia.
- **Supernatural**: A Dream Prince offers the PC an escape from Limbo, but in turn he must condemn someone else to sate its cruel desires. Can he sacrifice an innocent to save himself?

DISADVANTAGE BOMB

Certain Disadvantages, such as ***Nightmare***, ***Hauntings***, and ***Curses***, offer perfect opportunities for creating bombs. The GM can activate their saved Holds or simply introduce the bomb separately, as part of the fiction. Disadvantage bombs can be more elaborate, as they are intimately tied to the Intrigue Map and the campaign.

- **Self**: A PC with a ***Nemesis*** wakes up to a late night phone call. When he answer, there is no one on the other end of the line. Suddenly, every noise in the house seems sinister, menacing. But is the threat real or imagined?
- **Others**: The character is an ***Object of Desire***. People he's associated with begin showing up horribly murdered – victims of their jealous 'suitor,' who believes they are protecting the PC.
- **Society**: Exposed for his ***Sexual Neurosis***, the PC becomes targeted by the city's new Purity and Order program. Anyone taken in by the authorities is shipping off to an institutional facility for "treatment" – all their rights effectively revoked.
- **Supernatural**: After a PC's ***Experiment Gone Wrong***, the PC's **Relation** becomes targeted by the creature he created. It intends to continue the PC's experiment and transform the **Relation** into their perfect 'twin.'

MOOD BOMB

Mood bombs help set the story's prevailing tone. They frame the world's aesthetic nature, revealing the type of story the GM wishes to tell, such as dark humor, nihilistic despair, or eerie mystery. Mood bombs are also helpful in creating narrative contrasts, accenting important themes.

- **Self**: The GM wishes to set an uncanny atmosphere. The PC begins receiving live photo messages, showing pictures of his back. The pictures become more details, as though the sender is getting closer. If the PC turns around, he is alone.
- **Others**: The GM wishes to invoke themes of isolation and claustrophobia. The PC becomes trapped in an elevator with an unsettled person. As time goes on, he realize no one is coming, and the person with him has gone from anxious to panicked, insisting that they see things that aren't there. Can the PC help? How do they get out?
- **Society**: The GM wishes to explore themes of unrestrained passion and sexual mores. The PC's neighborhood

becomes inundated by lurid pamphlets announcing the opening of an exclusive nightclub. Locals – including those close to the PC – begin obsessing about its private lounge, talking openly about the disturbing things they hope to find inside.

- **Supernatural**: The GM wishes to invoke childhood fears. At first, the PC hears whispers at the foot of his bed. Then, he find old, broken toys at the foot of his bed. Soon, he find himself surrounded by tall, lanky shadows, towering over him, as if they'd become childlike in stature.

EXISTENTIAL BOMBS

These atmospheric bombs introduce thematic elements that incorporate *existential dread* into the narrative, encouraging uncanny and supernatural content (see ***Of Fears Unknown***, p. 152). They evoke the esoteric and unknowable, focusing on societal and philosophical fears.

- **Self**: The PC begins noticing silhouettes painted on the walls, vague at first, but more realistic as time progresses. These odd shadows become increasingly familiar; resembling dead people the PC once knew.
- **Others**: The PC's **Relation** clutches an old phone, the snapped cord wrapped around their arm like a bracelet. Impossibly, the phone rings. They answer it, only to frown in obvious distress. As the PC watches, his **Relation** pleads into the phone, "You need to come back. I'm alone here."
- **Society**: Random people begin clawing holes into the nearest surface, be it dirt or concrete. The PC witnesses one such person, their fingers bloody stumps from scratching at clay and concrete, nearly completing their hole. As the PC watches, the person begins pushing themselves into it, even though the space would be an impossible fit.
- **Supernatural**: The PC notices the hunched figure with impossibly long fingers and ragged teeth, skulking amongst the waiting subway patrons. Occasionally, it pauses to pluck glowing filaments from their hearts, gobbling the threads down like a bird. No one seems to notice its presence.

DISTURBING BOMBS

These atmospheric bombs introduce thematic elements that incorporate *extreme horror* into the narrative, encouraging hyper-violent content (see ***Disturbing Behaviors***, p. 178). They accentuate these transgressive themes to reveal the world's brutal and disturbing nature, testing the PCs' morality and nerve.

- **Self**: The PC hears the rhythmic thump and crunch of bones as the pedestrian goes under his wheels. As the ruined body appears in his rearview mirror, the PC realizes he have no idea how he came to be behind the wheel.
- **Others**: The PC wakes up in an unknown hotel room, strapped face down. A body lies in the bed beside him; its back has been flayed open. Lungs bulge from the bloodied apertures, still inflating with each pained breath. Nearby, someone is whistling.
- **Society**: The masked partygoers file into the ballroom, dragging the PCs with them. Upon entering, they collect knives, axes, and other sharp instruments from the reception desk. They head toward the immaculate dinner tables, each decorated with a naked, prone body.
- **Supernatural**: The sensual monstrosity slithers forward, an erotic construction of genders and forbidden passions. "Hurt me," it begs, parting its smooth legs. "I'll give you everything I am." They reach out, desperate to be used and defiled.

GROTESQUE BOMBS

These atmospheric bombs introduce thematic elements that incorporate *body horror* into the narrative, encouraging transformative content (see ***New Flesh, Ancient Desires***, p. 192). They accentuate these monstrous themes to evoke our primal fear of the grotesque and corrupted, as well as natural repulsion of assaults upon and within the human body.

- **Self**: The PC discover that the wine-dark patch on his thigh he's ignored has spread overnight, growing feverishly hot to the touch. When he press on it, something pushes back.
- **Others**: The PC's contact takes a chisel to their own teeth, prying them free. Yet, even as they lay bleeding, pointy white fangs erupt from the gums to replace them. When the contact's eyes open, they burn with primal hunger.
- **Society**: "You'll feel such joy, if you only let us help you." The group speaks as one, their bodies and faces identical in every way. One of them holds a mask of flesh, its pink surface quivering with anticipation. "It only hurts if you hold onto your false dreams."
- **Supernatural**: The model's delicate body tears apart. Glistening wings and black metal replace her nubile limbs and blonde curls, as the thing inside unfurls to her true height.

SUBLIME BOMBS

These atmospheric bombs introduce thematic elements that incorporate the *sublime* into the narrative, exploring the narrative space between the supernatural and hyperrealism (see ***Exquisite Horrors***, p. 208). They reveal lofty concepts and ideals to invoke exquisite emotions, assailing the mind and senses with their grandeur and terrible beauty.

- **Self**: The PC slips beneath the cascading water that blocks the tunnel's mouth. The crystalline torrent floods over him, stealing his breath with its frigid touch. He emerge onto a glacial plane that stretches in every direction. Already his body begins dying from the cold, but his mind is clearer than it's ever been.
- **Others**: The PC's **Relation** stands on the ledge overlooking the city. A thousand colors dance over her naked flesh. Neon and flashing lights sparkle against the night. She smiles, and then steps out upon this carpet of stars.
- **Society**: The night market hums with humanity, countless voices merging into a chiming, deafening music. Bodies press tightly together, ceaselessly feeding,

buying, selling, assessing. This collection of people beckons, allowing anyone into its ranks, inviting the PCs to become one with the many.

- **Supernatural**: At first, one might believe the vast reservoir contained inky water; its polished surface perfectly reflects the thunderheads above. Then its surface shimmers and undulates, the membranous mass terribly alive and restless. Ragged whirlpools open along its endless body, waiting to expel something from deep within.

TRAUMA BOMBS

These atmospheric bombs introduce thematic elements that incorporate trauma and suffering into the narrative, exploring the physical and psychic wounds that bind and shape humanity (see ***Prisons of the Self***, p. 222). These bombs, in particular, build upon the Dark Secrets and Disadvantages that restrain us, as well as expose the unsavory truths that brought them into being.

- **Self**: The PC stands on the corner, waiting for the others to arrive. Behind him is a playground filled with children. An angry parent approaches him, accusing him of aberrant behavior, the same alleged offenses that sent the PC into a horrific juvenile detention facility, even though he were innocent of all accusations.
- **Others**: The PC accidentally finds his partner's drug-kit, hidden together with old love letters from their abusive ex. Before he can put it back, his partner discovers him in the act.
- **Society**: The crowd chants obscenities at the same-sex couple, pursuing them down the street. More people join in, as if swept up in some frenzy, adding their voices to the accusations and insults. The couple tries to retreat, crying out as people start throwing things at them.
- **Supernatural**: At the rehab center, several youths sit in a circle, recounting their physical and sexual abuse. The PC sees his reflections in the glass of nearby framed pictures. His body appear broken and bloodied, violated in heartbreaking ways. An inhuman shape looms over each of the reflections, greedily licking at their infected wounds.

DRAMATIC HOOKS

Dramatic Hooks are player-initiated subplots which allow the group to set character goals for themselves and each other (see *KDL*, p. 136). These spotlight moments encourage character-driven roleplaying and expand each PC's personal narrative or backstory. In effect, a Dramatic Hook temporarily shifts the conversation away from the main, communal storyline for a scene or two, and provides a single PC an opportunity to shine.

On a group level, Dramatic Hooks encourage a collaborative storytelling experience, furthering player investment in the conversation, as they directly contribute to each other's enjoyment and purpose. Over time, this process adds meaning and variety to their mutually-designed gaming experience.

Using it is ultimately optional, however. In some parts of the story the GM may decide to remove or pause the Dramatic Hooks, such as to focus on the conclusion of a chapter or the entire tale, and in some shorter scenarios or campaigns they may not occur at all.

Process

At the start of the first session, each player designates two Dramatic Hooks they'd like their own PC to pursue or address during the session. Every time one of these Hooks is resolved, the player receives an additional **Experience** – i.e., a maximum of two extra **Experience** per session.

After the first session, whenever a player has less than two Dramatic Hooks unresolved, they request new Dramatic Hooks for their character. This is best handled during downtime, i.e. either after the end of a session or before the start of the next one. Since Dramatic Hooks are tightly tied to the characters' **Experience** gain, it is suitable and practical to have the discussion about them in close temporal proximity to each other. Requesting, suggesting, and assigning new Hooks to each other's PCs right after the group has asked themselves the experience questions may be the most intuitive way to do this.

Format

Generally, hooks take the form of a request that adheres to the following format:

[Character name] *should* **[verb]** + *signifier*,

e.g. ***Alice*** *should* ***Confront*** *her phobia of water.*

Player consent is key, here. The group may suggest any Dramatic Hook they think would be interesting, but the character's player decides whether it seems to suit their PC. If not, the player can request another Dramatic Hook instead. It's encouraged to discuss this, kicking ideas back and forth as the group finetunes the Hook to be just right for everyone's liking, rather than accepting Hooks unquestioningly or rejecting them completely.

For groups who have already become more comfortable with their conversation, there is an advanced improvisational technique available: The Dramatic Hook's *signifier* can have additional qualities and requirements, possibly even multiple ones. This allows the GM to test the PC even farther. In this variant, the Hook progresses beyond its initial moment of crisis and singular resolution – turning it into a whole story arc of its own. Players can request such prolonged narratively focused Hooks to better showcase the character's personal development. These Dramatic Hooks can also be used to reflect specific setting details, character quirks, themes, or Principles.

Example:

The Academic's player is offered the Dramatic Hook, ***Gregory*** *should* ***become embroiled*** *in a political intrigue*. The player would like a bit more than that though, and after some discussion, the group makes it into ***Gregory*** *should* ***become embroiled*** *in a political intrigue that tests his loyalties*. They agree to make it a prolonged series of Hooks, going on for as long as the player engages with the intrigue.

Thus, throughout the story, the GM will have The Academic find himself stuck between supporting his supervisor or defending his mentor, both of whom are vying for tenure at the university. This political conflict places their standing – and his **Relations** to both of them – at risk, potentially altering Gregory's career forever.

For prolonged, multi-parted Hooks, it is recommended to divide them into intermittent milestone events or crossroad choices, and grant the player their **Experience** reward after each one of these.

Handling a Dramatic Scene

Once the Dramatic Hooks are all assigned, the players will start looking for opportunities to pursue them during the next session. The GM may have prepared something for when they do, guiding their pursuits into a preconceived scene, or she may let herself get surprised by what the players will come up with and where it may lead them.

When a Dramatic Scene ensues, the GM should push hard towards addressing the respective Hook's central issue, framing choices firmly and driving the scene towards a decisive resolution. The GM can – and is encouraged to – use their Holds to make the scene even more intense.

Upon the scene's resolution, the PC receives an additional **Experience**, no matter the outcome.

Example:

In the above example, the GM and Alice's player arrange for the PC to save one of her NPC **Relations** from the river, forcing her to *Confront her fears*. This Dramatic Scene can end in several ways, as the PC's actions indicate – and the dice permit.

Perhaps Alice overcomes her dread and dives into the water, saving their friend. This may strengthen their **Relation's** loyalty and trust in her, and might increase her self-confidence in the wake of her own courage.

Perhaps Alice struggles with her phobia, stalling her rescue attempts, and her hesitation forces another PC to act on her behalf. This may have negative consequences on the relationship and Alice's psyche. In either case, the scene – and the Hook – is considered resolved, and the player receives their **Experience** reward.

Such a resolution should be cathartic, i.e. the scene's tension and intensity resolves, and attention is directed elsewhere once more.

As a general rule of thumb, as with any good story, individual PCs' Dramatic Hooks shouldn't overshadow the main narrative, or the other characters. While everyone deserves their moment in the spotlight, the conversation – the group's collective storytelling – always comes first.

Calls to Action

Dramatic hooks are effective calls to action. They generate narrative tension by tempting the PCs out of their comfort zone. As such, when developing them, the GM and players needn't limit themselves to the standard eight verbs: *Complete*, *Confront*, *Develop*, *Finish*, *Investigate*, *Reveal*, *Tell*, and *Visit*. Hooks can be based around any verb or idea, as long as it helps reveal the PCs personality and expands their story arc.

Example:

The Avenger, David, discovers he inadvertently killed his ward's mother, thus becoming what he despises most. The group provides the player with the Dramatic Hook, ***David*** *should* ***Confess*** *his crime*. Doing so will likely alter his relationship as a Guardian forever, as well as make it more difficult to fulfill their duty in the future.

Some Suggested Verbs

- Acquire
- Build
- Change
- Control
- Defeat
- Defend
- Endure
- Experience
- Experiment
- Explore
- Forgive
- Gather
- Guide
- Help
- Influence
- Join
- Master
- Negotiate
- Obtain
- Overcome
- Perform
- Protect
- Question
- Research
- Restore
- Save
- Shape
- Solve
- Study
- Test
- Train
- Use

Alternative Dramatic Rewards

Instead of **1 Experience**, you may also decide to award players a regain of **1 Stability** for each Dramatic Hook they resolve. In this variant – first seen used in the scenario *Gallery of Souls* – Hooks should be focused on addressing and confronting issues that are weighing on the characters' consciousness, troubling them emotionally, or otherwise mentally burdening them. Resolving such Hooks will ease their minds a precious little bit, soothe their frayed nerves, and allow them to sleep a little easier once again.

As usual, the reward should be granted regardless of the scene's outcome, as long as the issue was confronted in some meaningful way.

This variant is ideal for campaigns or scenarios in which the PCs will predictably have little time or opportunity to interact with their NPC **Relations** (e.g. because they have all been abducted to Metropolis in the beginning), do not have very many **Relations** with each other (e.g. because they are strangers in the beginning of thee narration), and for games in which the GM doesn't mind the speed of **Experience** accumulation to be slowed down a bit (since the bonus **Experience** from the Hooks falls away, advancement will be noticably slower than in a standard campaign).

An ambitious GM might even combine the default method with this alternative variant. Whenever the group suggests a new Dramatic Hook for one of the PCs, and that character's player agrees to it, the GM determines whether resolving this Hook will more likely have an instructive, enlightening, or otherwise developmental effect on the character (award **Experience**), or whether it is more apt to restore a margin of their sanity and composure (grant **Stability** regain).

This decision may either be announced by the GM right away when the Dramatic Hook is chosen, or it may be reserved until after it has been addressed and resolved.

Downtime

By its nature, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** embraces emergent storytelling through the conversation. As discussed previously, this collaborative approach creates unique stories, based on player choice and narrative causality. However, this form of emergent storytelling does not mean the GM needs solely respond to the game session's moment-by-moment plot development. Indeed, the conversation can produce dynamic narrative elements that extend well beyond singular sessions, especially in long-term games.

As such, downtime allows the GM to gather these divergent plot threads together and weave them into cohesive character and story arcs (*KDL*, p. 192). Typically occurring between game sessions, downtime represents two different narrative stages: *Transitional* and *Interval*. By combining both of these forms of downtime, the GM can continually evolve the Intrigue Map's plot structure, and develop new, narrative opportunities for the next session.

Transitional

Transitional downtime occurs between sessions, where the scenario/chapter ended without resolution, such as on a cliffhanger. Typically, the next session begins *in media res*, where no in-game time has passed, and the story progresses without narrative disruptions. Therefore, the GM's sole focus is the immediate and/or short-term consequences stemming from the PCs' prior actions. These take the form of held-over GM Moves, as well as triggered bombs and *Reactions*, which are discussed more below. Using these narrative elements allows the GM to ground and reinvest the players in the story as quickly as possible when the new session begins.

Due to its narrative immediacy, developing transitional downtime should be pretty straightforward. The GM simply asks, '*What just happened to the PCs?' Had they escaped the monster's lair? Did the Illusion shatter? Had their friend just betrayed them? Had they uncovered some vital, yet horrible, truth?* The GM builds from these answers, developing appropriate threats to be introduced next session. She may incorporate unused hubs/links from the Intrigue Map, or create new ones to expand the current story. Again, any consequences should have the greatest impact on the PCs and be appropriate to the story.

- The PCs eluded capture by the police and hid in an abandoned subway. As the game starts, they're discovered by the ruler of this section of the underground. *How do the PCs respond to the NPC's bizarre and mercurial personality?*
- The PCs escaped the burning library, only to be confronted by an NPC offering them a quick getaway. As the session begins, they must immediately decide: *do they go with the person or continue fleeing on their own?*

- The PCs are left shaken after their colleague reveals themselves to be a nepharite, stealing their hard-won prize; a collection of ancient tomes. They've lost the materials to stop the upcoming ritual, have few clues, and are now friendless. *What do they do?*
- The PCs wake up after being overcome by the factory's intense heat and gas fumes. Little do they know, they've been transported to Machine City and are sinking slowly into the garbage pile of some biomechanical structure. They have little time to get their bearings, as something tries to recycle them into building materials.
- After their **Relation** is kidnapped, the PCs have been thrown into disarray. The following night, a box with the **Relation's** finger arrives. *Bring the item to the bus station at 8PM tonight, or I'll send more pieces.*

In addition, the GM can use transitional downtime to lay the groundwork for the story's ultimate conclusion by introducing new plot twists. 'Possible' conclusions should be tied to one or more of the PCs, as well as whatever best reflects the story's narrative themes. This is particularly effective in one-shot stories, which are designed to have concrete resolutions. For campaigns, preplanned endings can help establish future aspects of the overall story. This approach to transitional downtime can be especially helpful when the previous session ended in a major setback and/or unresolved obstacle. The GM can provide new clues and opportunities to immediately move the conversation forward.

- The PCs uncovered an artifact connected to Limbo, but never used it. The GM adds this object to the Intrigue Map and links it to *The Nightingale of the City*. When triggered, the artifact summons the entity, who can provide the PCs information to resolve the scenario – for a terrible price.
- After being thoroughly defeated, the PCs regroup at their hideout to discuss how to proceed. As they're talking, the computer turns on, revealing a twisted face. Its inhuman voice drips from the speakers, "Is the enemy of my enemy my friend? Shall we find out?"
- The PCs visited their contact's cabin, only to find him lying in the middle of the floor; drowned, yet his body was completely dry. His dead fingers clench around a photograph of another lake house, probably taken from the nearby dock.
- After their arrest, the PCs are waiting in the county jail cell. The door softly clicks, and then swings wide open. A rank smell fills their noses, death and old blood. As they watch, the walls begin to peel like moldering flesh. Somewhere in the building, a lilting voice calls to them.
- Having taken the train, the PCs' arrive in the small town on their sketchy map. As they disembark, they see a well-dressed chauffeur, holding an introduction sign with their names. She smiles politely, "My employer wished to speak with you."

Interval

Interval downtime occurs between sessions, where the previous scenario/chapter resolved itself and in-game time transpired. In effect, this interlude portrays the PCs' daily lives between major story developments, as well as reveals potential consequences to their actions. Interval downtime allows the GM to further develop the game world, as well as modify significant narrative elements. In particular, they should look for opportunities to spotlight PCs and their narrative threads, promoting the conversation's natural progression.

Players should be directly involved during Interval downtime, describing their character's actions, desires, and motivations during the narrative interlude. Firstly, they should outline what effects (if any) the previous story had on their PC. For ease, this discussion can be combined with standard ***Character Development*** (*KDL*, p. 136) process, supplementing the PC's continuing advancement. Together, the GM and players assign and spend character **Experience** (*KDL*, p. 136), explaining these advances through the fiction. Similarly, they can add narrative context to **Experience** acquired through Advantages and Dramatic Hooks (p. 60). The GM and players can use this opportunity to assign new Dramatic Hooks for the next session.

The Criminal has enough **Experience** to select a new Advantage from their Archetype. The player choses ***Burglar*** to increase the PC's breaking and entering skills. They explain that the PC spends their downtime learning alarms and locks with the local cat burglar. The GM decides to add this NPC to the Intrigue Map [Hub: Contact].

Each player can also set short-term goals for their PCs, which are resolved during downtime – rolling for Interval Moves, if necessary. With the GM's consent, narrative successes and setbacks from the previous session may develop into new character Advantages and Disadvantages. The GM should also determine what **Reactions** occur, as a result of the PCs' actions (p. 64). In turn, these various changes and developments can evolve into new hubs/links on the Intrigue Map.

- **The Occultist** contacted an Elysium goddess, Persephone, to dispel the nest of phantoms plaguing the shopping center. The GM adds the goddess to the Intrigue Map (Hub: Monster), as well as the link, *Must aid her whenever summoned*. The GM also lists this entity as a potential bomb for the next session.
- **The Careerist** suffered tremendously at the hands of Section 11, tortured mentally and physically until his **Stability** was reduced to **Broken**. He spend the Interval downtime recovering, but the GM inflicts the PC with ***Nightmares***. He is also now *known* by Section 11 [Hub: Organization], with the group becoming a recurring threat.
- **The Fixer** and fellow PCs saved an influential member of the local crime syndicate. In reward, this new source [Hub: Contact] *provides them information* on their ***Competitor***. However, the source isn't above feeding information in the other direction, as well.
- **The Deceiver** inadvertently caused his contact to be killed, eliminating that hub/link on the Intrigue Map. However, the contact's friends belong to The Sirens [Hub: Group], who *mark the PC for revenge*. They begin stalking the character, leaving threatening messages in his voicemail and email, and posting shocking photos of the character on social media.

- **The Detective** declares he's spending his downtime looking through closed-case files, which document killings similar to those discovered in the last session. His successful ***Crime Scene Investigator*** reveals several records misfiled, manipulated, or completely missing. Clues provide common links to the PC's ***Stalker*** [Hub: Leader].
- **The Drifter** spends his downtime outside the city, traveling. The player describes the PC settling temporarily in another town, establishing his contacts and relationships. The GM provides the player with a free ***Wanderer*** option, if he should return here. Secretly, the GM decides this town [Hub: Place] will feature in the next story and adds it to the Intrigue Map.

INTERVAL MOVES

Following each game session, there may be several unresolved 'mechanical' items, such as unspent options and Hold. The PCs may also have suffered serious physical injuries and mental traumas. Realistically, these would not simply disappear into the ether, but continue to affect the PCs during downtime. Indeed, these outstanding plot points could have lasting narrative significance. As such, the game group have the option to resolve these through Interval Moves, which exist solely during downtime.

Players may have unspent options remaining from successful Advantage rolls. Normally, these opportunities disappear when the session/story concludes. At the GM's discretion, the player may utilize these unspent options during downtime, reflecting the PC's continual progress toward their goals. These Interval Moves allow the players to resolve loose plot threads and objectives prior to the next game session, usually through brief overviews or short scenes.

Similarly, the GM can also use Interval downtime to utilize any unspent Hold. These Interval Moves – soft or hard – emerge during downtime and/or set-up new influences and threats for the next story. Indeed, the players may not be aware of their existence until much later in the story. Whenever possible, the GM should weave their Interval Moves and the player's together, developing more concise and coherent narratives.

- **The Academic** uses an unspent ***Authority*** option to access the university's archives to research the death magician's notebook. In turn, the GM expends unspent Hold from the PC's ***Stalker*** roll; the NPC spreads scathing rumors around the PC's university. In the next story, **The Academic** gains vital information, but is shunned by his peers.
- **The Hacker** has two ***Prepared*** options, which remain unspent as the group didn't go to the organization's medical offices. The player expends the options during downtime, learning that the organization has an off-site facility, which has unusually high security. The GM adds this to the Intrigue Map [Hub: Place], altering the story so Malkuth's dream experiments are conducted there instead.
- **The Prophet** has an unspent ***Cult Leader*** option. Although the ritual concluded in the previous session, the GM allows the player to expend it during downtime. While recuperating, the PC receives visions of a portal opening to Metropolis, somewhere in the city's industrial sector. This represents the antagonist's arrival in the next scenario.
- After passing out, **The Avenger** has an unspent ***Voice of Pain*** option against his rival [Hub: Leader]. As this option is permanent, the GM allows the player to expend it during the next fight. In turn, the GM expends *The Avenger's* unspent ***Nightmares*** Hold; the PC continually dreams of their agonizing defeat, starting the next session at ***-1 ongoing***.
- The GM has two ***Involuntary Medium*** Hold remaining over **The Broken**. She expend both Moves to take over the PC's body during downtime. When the session begins, the PC awakes in the steam tunnels, covered in blood. Now, the player must discover what happened during the PC's memory lapse.
- **The Cursed** died at the conclusion of the previous story, his body washed away. During downtime, he activate ***Sealed Fate***, marking 2 Time. The PC wakes up miles down river, resurrected and unharmed. The GM and player discuss the circumstances of the PCs returning home.

At the session's conclusion, the PCs may be suffering from physical and mental damage, such as Severe **Wounds** and **Stability** loss. Mechanically, these have little or no effect in the next session. However, *realistically*, dramatic injuries and traumas should have long-lasting, narrative consequences. During Interval downtime, the GM may require that the PCs seek appropriate treatment for their injuries, such as bedrest/hospitalization and/or therapy/institutionalization. Otherwise, the negative effects and penalties from failed ***Endure Injury*** and ***Keep It Together*** rolls may persist into the next story. Prolonged effects from injuries are discussed in *The Reality of Pain* (p. 189). Of course, this is completely optional, and requires consent from both the GM and players.

Reactions

Although story outlines are helpful, collaborative narratives are not scripted affairs springing fully formed from a GM's skull. Instead, stories in *KULT: Divinity Lost* continually and naturally evolve through the shared conversation. The PCs do not exist in a static universe; their actions have *narrative consequences*, also known as Reactions (*KDL*, p. 194). During downtime, the GM determines how the story's main Influences respond to the PCs' actions. Under certain circumstances, Influences may also have Reactions to each other, responding to narrative changes and opportunities. From these Reactions, the GM can expand and transform the Intrigue Map, potentially resulting in far-reaching repercussions – even without the players' knowledge.

In one-to-three session stories, Reactions are not as vital, as the conversation will be resolved before any Inciting Actions can truly resonate. However, in long-term games, Reactions become vitally important to the overall narrative, as they inherently alter how the story progresses. Indeed, they can spawn additional plots, events, and threats later in the campaign. More importantly, perhaps, Reactions push the PCs into better understanding their Dark Secrets and the world beyond the Illusion.

When developing Reactions, the GM should consider three factors: the *Inciting Action*, *Processing/Decision*, and the *Resulting Reaction*. These three concepts will help guide the GM toward creating compelling and realistic Reactions.

INCITING ACTION

An *Inciting Action* is any PC action that directly or indirectly affects the goals of another Influence. Like ripples on a pond, Inciting Actions can spread outwards, affecting several Influences in various ways and to differing degrees. In most cases, the action negatively affects the Influence's goals, creating a fail-state. However, the Inciting Action may provide Influences the opportunity to advance their goals, as well. As such, several Reactions may stem from the singular Inciting Action, effectively altering the entire Intrigue Map.

- The PCs burn the White Dragon gang's warehouse, destroying its stockpile of illegal weapons. As such, the White Dragon's leader – a devotee of Kether – is unable to arm his men for their attack on the Tokyo underworld. The local Yakuza, devotees of Hod, learn of this opportunity.
- **The Ronin** completes his latest assignment and assassinates an abusive playboy. Unfortunately, he was the only son of the Etir Group's CEO – and she is an obsessively protective mother. **The Ronin's** unnamed client knows her dangerous nature, and hid this information to sweeten the deal.
- By utilizing the Black Roads between cities, the PCs unknowingly unleash an avatar of She Who Waits Below. This monster begins hunting the Children of the Underworld, feeding off their mental energies and leaving empty husks behind.
- **The Agent** uncovers corruption amongst the Border Patrol, and provides indisputable evidence to the media. In doing so, he expose the agency's human trafficking operation, overseen by devotees of the Death Angel Gamichicoth. The resulting public outcry attracts the attention of a lictor serving Archon Geburah.
- The PCs save a vagrant from being ritually murdered. However, they don't realize they've prevented an offering to the Glass God, an entity slumbering beneath the financial district.
- **The Doll** ends an affair with his lover as the relationship is exposed in the tabloids. The ex-lover is a prominent businessman, and his husband is deeply afraid of scandal. The jilted lover does not want his relationship with the PC to end, rocking the sordid connection between the three people involved and delighting the junk news circuit.

PROCESSING/DECISION

In the *Processing/Decision* phase, the GM determines how the Influence deals with the Inciting Action, as well as how it might affect the overall goals. This may be an emotional and/or logical process, depending on the Influence's nature. The GM may wish to consider how the Influence's main Principle also affects this analysis. For example, someone following the Vengeance Principle will respond far differently than someone adhering to Submission. In addition, the GM determines how much information the Influence has regarding the Inciting Action. They may be unaware of mitigating factors and misinterpret information, thus tainting their decision-making process.

Then, the GM determines how the Influence decides to deal with the Inciting Action, usually realigning their goals. *Do they resolve to overcome this new problem? Can they take advantage of the situation? Do they ignore or completely retreat from the issue?* This new strategy affects the influence's ultimate Reaction.

- The White Dragon Leader can no longer move forward with his plans, and his assets have become vulnerable. However, driven by his Principle (Hierarchy), the leader becomes fearful of his superiors' reprisal, knowing he must act to reassert his power. Meanwhile, the Yakuza realize they have the upper hand, and cannot afford to miss using this opportunity to their advantage.
- Driven by ***Vengeance***, the CEO swears to avenge her son's death. Anyone even remotely involved in his death becomes her target. This is exactly what **The Ronin's** client anticipated, hoping her son's death would drive the CEO into hasty actions.
- The Children of the Underworld realize that the threat is the rogue avatar. However, due to its overwhelming power, they are unable to drive it back. They trace its escape from the Black Roads to the PCs. The Children decide to use the PCs to solve the problem for them.
- Gamichicoth's devotees realize the blow dealt by **The Agent**. **The Agent's** superiors know public unrest could lead to the defunding, or even the delegitimization, of their entire branch of law enforcement. The lictor cannot abide this corruption and needs to root it out completely.
- The Glass God's priests are panicked, knowing the forgotten deity will soon wake up from its magical sleep. However, they believe the previous ritual is no longer enough – their failure is an insult to the god. They decide they need to perform a new ritual, and use the PCs as an appeasement.
- The lover's husband reveals that he knows about the affair. In turn, the lover decides he's no longer interested in maintaining this charade. He also wants **The Doll** back, at any cost. If the lover gets rid of his husband, he kills two birds with one stone.

RESULTING REACTION

Once the decision is made, the Influence instigates their *Resulting Reaction*. As discussed above, this Reaction may not immediately affect the narrative or directly involve the PCs. The GM alters the Intrigue Map appropriately and develops new threads, if required. In turn, these Reactions may produce additional Inciting Actions, starting the cycle over again with other Influences. However, the GM should temper this with what works best for the narrative, lest the resulting Reactions overwhelm the story itself. As always, Reactions should supplement the main story, adding realism and compelling narrative arcs to the conversation, and not dominate its natural progression.

- The White Dragon's leader publicly blames his underlings and demands they regain their honor by killing the PCs. He tries allying himself with local gangs, regaining power and resources, while continually hiding his failure. Meanwhile, the Yakuza launch assaults on the White Dragon's assets, taking advantage of the chaos, expanding Hod's influence.
- The CEO begins her campaign of vengeance, lashing out indiscriminately. **The Ronin's** former client leaks information about them, hoping to endear themselves to the CEO and shift blame. As predicted, she turns her full attention to the PC.
- The Children of the Underworld confront the PCs, demanding that they find the avatar and return it to the Black Roads. If they do not, the Children will seek vengeance. The avatar itself has begun hunting humans, attracting the attention of other Influences in the city.
- The devotees begin systematically destroying any evidence, including killing their human captives. With the agency's help, they blame the local criminal gangs for this violence. Meanwhile, the lictor contacts **The Agent** and tries to enlist them, showing them how deep the corruption goes.
- The Glass God's worshipers use their considerable financial resources to isolate and capture the PCs and the vagrant. They need to have them all together to perform the revised ritual, and so grow increasingly brazen as time counts down to the Awakening.
- The lover takes his husband to a secluded location to "work things out." Instead, the lover murders his spouse, and hides the body. He also plants personal items he's acquired from **The Doll**. He contacts the PC, demanding that he be taken back, or he'll blame the spouse's disappearance on them.

CONSISTENT ESCALATION

Through Reactions, the GM creates narrative conflicts that reveal the PCs' personalities and define their roles in the story. As such, when developing their Reactions, the GM's escalations should remain consistent with their narrative's style and themes, as well as adhere to the *Horror Contract*. Much like literature and movies, conflict resolutions help establish the story's atmosphere and tones. In more action-oriented narratives, conflicts escalate quickly and violently, exploring tense and hectic situations. In quiet horror, the conflicts are ambiguous and low-key, dominated by an oppressive, sinister atmosphere. Striking the right balance between conflicts and themes helps reveal the story's meaning and importance, investing the players more deeply in it. Reactions can add tension and dread, helping to shift the session along the ***Spiral of Horror*** (p. 24).

The campaign's main themes are *cosmic horror*, *sensuality*, and *societal fears*. The GM focuses their Reactions on these three concepts. The Higher Power plays a significant role in the game, as well as the Realm of Passion. Influences also revolve around the corporate and political worlds, interwoven with forbidden desires and existential dread.

The GM can also use escalated Reactions to juxtapose her current themes, shaking things up narratively. For example, introducing hyper-violence into a dramatic story feels shocking and tense, unsettling the players. This departure from the norm resonates through the story, so the PCs never feel entirely safe.

THEMES

While the plot-line represents the story's body, the **theme** reflects the story's heart. In essence, the theme answers the question, *What is this story actually about*? The theme is an integral aspect of the narrative, as it reveals why the story is being told and why it matters. Indeed, themes are vital to ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, as they can expose the human condition, allowing for more personalized – and impactful – stories. For this reason, the Higher Power's Principles are excellent themes to introduce into the narratives, as they reflect the essence of the game's underlying mythos. When presented effectively, the story's themes can resonate with the players long after the session ends.

Furthermore, establishing strong themes allows the GM to maintain story alignment. They can accentuate and flavor narrative elements, creating foundations upon which to build the conversation. Thematic leanings help guide the GM as they guide the story. Much like narrative filters, themes allow stories to be told through different lenses, revealing meaningful concepts and emotions. They add new interpretations and perspectives, transforming the mundane into something memorable.

However, the theme should not be mistaken for *mood* and/or *tone*. These are separate concepts, meant to create an emotional response from the player, usually through atmosphere and setting (see ***Book Two: Atmosphere***). Instead, mood and tone allow the GM to explore thematic concepts by creating an ambience that reflects them in different lights. For example, the theme of Power has very different connotations when presented in Los Cabos' violent criminal underworld, as opposed to the flashy extravagance of Monte Carlo's aristocrats. The GM can produce compelling stories by atmospherically accenting themes in this manner.

Introducing Themes

Themes need not be glaringly obvious to the players, but portrayed through character interaction and woven into the background. Much like the atmosphere, themes create feelings of connection to the narrative. For this reason, they're vitally important to the conversation and ***Environmental Storytelling*** (p. 107). Introducing themes into the storytelling process helps define the story's purpose, supporting its foundational concepts, rather than forcing their way to the forefront. As such, the GM may wish to introduce their themes during character creation, as these can help lay early groundwork, such as the players defining their PCs' Dark Secrets, narratively binding them together.

During the first session, the GM should try to weave the underlying themes already into the story's initial scenes. As the conversation continues, these thematic elements can inspire the GM to open additional character and story arcs, changing the narrative in new ways. Themes can also be conveyed via bombs and Dramatic Hooks, as well as GM Moves, used throughout the conversation. By the story's end, the players can make their own conclusions on how the narrative affected them and what it revealed about their PCs. Many of the best themes ask questions that are controversial and highly debatable. Yet, there is no 'right-or-wrong' answer; themes are matters of perspective and affect people differently. In many ways, themes are personally experienced rather than verbally expressed.

Set in Detroit, the quickplay scenario *Oakwood Heights*, revolves around divergent PCs engaged in crime-scene reenactments – each for their own purpose. *Narratively*, they must escort the criminal, Franklin Mills, to two murder scenes, hoping to unlock his memories and solve the mystery surrounding his terrible crimes. *Thematically*, the scenario explores the concepts of *Parent/Child Relationships* and the *Need for Affirmation* from others. These themes resonate throughout the story, affecting both PCs and NPCs in various ways.

Themes can serve as the story's main inspiration, where the GM takes basic thematic concepts and expands them into complex narratives. Never limited to just a singular interpretation, any theme can be presented through numerous expositions, all of which are equally valid and significant. Indeed, the GM may wish to approach the themes from various viewpoints, heightening their emotional resonance in the main story.

An example campaign's main theme is *Loss of Innocence.* The GM can incorporate this theme into any of the following story arcs:

- Once gentle and optimistic, an NPC becomes a broken, disillusioned shell of their former self. They refuse to discuss their recent relationship.
- Packs of latchkey children start roaming the streets, causing trouble. Their antics become increasingly sinister and violent.
- The PC must either reveal the horrid truth to his friend or allow them to live in false innocence, likely to their detriment.
- A character encounters someone from his past, reminding him of more innocent times. Can they recapture that purity again?
- The toy store owner is found mutilated and dressed like a doll. Dozens of toys lay around them, destroyed in a rage.
- Neighborhood kids gather at an abandoned house after school, where they sit around the broken television, watching blurry images of physical and sexual violence. There is no power source for the TV.
- A person desperately seeks to regain their childhood, partaking in drugs that mentally, and sometimes even physically, regress users.
- A deceitful dream creature offers children an escape from their pain into an innocent, fairytale existence.

CULTURAL THEMES

Horror is an emotion derived from cultural perceptions and fears. Accordingly, beyond the universal human condition, the themes of one culture may have little to no relevance in another. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the Higher Powers and their Principles may have different meanings within each culture. As such, when introducing thematic elements into their narratives, the GM should consider the setting's cultural beliefs and perspectives. For example, themes of Community in Asian countries can differ vastly from those in European nations. They have conflicting perceptions on uniqueness and privacy, due to the very nature of their cities, lifestyles, mentalities... all the things that make up their cultures. These perceptions resonate throughout each society, both binding and liberating the individual in divergent ways. Differing anxieties and fears emerge from these constraints and freedoms, shaping what makes for a horrifying narrative in various ways. Encouraging this cultural resonance makes for more compelling and believable narratives, and engages the players more deeply into the story's subtext.

The GM should also take the players' own cultural perspectives into consideration, being both respectful and understanding. Indeed, this may affect the *Horror Contract* itself, as certain subjects may be considered uncomfortable or even forbidden.

Contrasting Themes

The world of ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** resonates with contrasts, which are conspicuous and subtle, concrete and blurred. Even recognizable concepts, such as Heaven and Hell, can be simultaneously beautiful and horrific. By employing contrasting themes, the GM introduces narrative tension to their stories, and inspires thematic conflicts throughout. This technique also exposes the dichotomies within the PCs themselves, as it forces their players to view different moral perspectives and make difficult choices.

During the story's conception, the GM selects two narrative elements – usually threats – that represent diametrically opposed viewpoints for the story's theme. They also include narrative triggers and situations that may reveal these contrasts during the conversation. In this fashion, as the scenario progresses, the PCs are exposed to both viewpoints, learning the pros and cons of each, until they can develop their own conclusions. However, this thematic arc does not need to be resolved to complete the main storyline. Indeed, both contrasting elements may ultimately triumph or fail, or become established aspects of the Intrigue Map. Their main purpose is to address the story's theme from different perspectives.

Another example campaign revolves around how Control defines our role in society, specifically our beliefs, culture, and tradition. The GM chooses the contrasting Influences: Chokmah (Submission) versus Sathariel (Exclusion). During the story, they represent the viewpoints of *submitting to societal control and being accepted against denying societal norms and suffering scorn and ostracism.*

During the story, the PCs encounter careerists who are powerful and wealthy, yet buckling under the strain of corporate culture and policy, forever fearful of being cast out (Submission). They're opposed by ex-corporates turned anarchists, living freely as they wish, but socially shunned and obsessed with tearing down the system (Exclusion). Both groups seek to harness Limbo to control and influence society, pushing it toward their beliefs. If either succeeds, the results could be catastrophic.

Common Themes

Stories in *KULT: Divinity Lost* best explore themes that reflect aspects of personal horror and dialectically opposing concepts. In fact, the horror genre makes a perfect medium for revealing the unspoken truths of human nature. It tests us, strips away our defenses, and makes us feel uncomfortable. Effective stories make us examine our reality's dark undercurrents, exploring questions most prefer left unasked. Incorporating the following themes can help GMs infuse their narratives with relevance and meaning, making campaigns truly memorable.

MATURATION

Thematically, *Maturation* dwells at the heart of most *KULT: Divinity Lost* stories. As campaigns progress, the PCs struggle against their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages, as well as the various terrors assailing them. In short, to fight the monsters without, they must overcome the monsters lurking within. Effective narrative resolutions hinge on the PCs' evolution, even if they fail to achieve personal enlightenment. By story's end, they have been tested physically, mentally, and emotionally, and emerge as different people than before. This frightful journey of the soul is the essence of the *Maturation* theme.

Coming of Age: As we transition from childhood to adulthood, we leave our innocence and dreams behind, awakening to another world and new responsibilities. We recognize our frailties and strengths, accepting challenges and realizations that force us to abandon our youthful ways. In accepting our new reality and place in the adult world, we're forever changed.

Loss and/or Rediscovery of Innocence: We embrace our innocence, clinging to it desperately. But ultimately, upon reaching maturity, we must bury our childhood dreams and wistful fantasies deep inside. Once they are destroyed, they can never be totally rebuilt. Perhaps we need this process of letting go forced upon us to mature. Perhaps we are unable – or unwilling – to accept the truth and are destroyed by it. But when we witness the impossible, the supernatural, the traces of our former divinity, our imaginations are reignited with wonder and hope. Those possibilities reawaken the child inside and we dare to dream once more.

Embracing Our Pain: We are broken, brittle things, who refuse to accept cruel realities. These denials restrain our souls with comforting ignorance. But once we truly accept our foibles and weaknesses, we can remove our self-inflicted shackles and step into our uncertain futures.

Sins of the Father: Are we doomed to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors? Are we our parents' child or our own person? How deeply do their beliefs and teachings define us? Do we accept our parent's false wisdom or deny their ugly truths? From this unbalanced relationship grow our most cherished and painful memories.

Rebirth into a New Life: The moment comes when we must be reborn as our own person. In this new identity, our decisions are unfettered and true, defining our souls and place in society. Do we do so with courage or caution? Will we settle in calm sovereignty or humble submission? Can we accept our responsibilities and the consequences that come with them?

The Bonds of Regret: Time moves ever forward, ticking away our lives with merciless precision. We can never go back and fix those moments of regret – the would-haves, should-haves, and could-haves. Once we recognize that our actions have eternal consequences, we are bound by chains of melancholy and regret, our souls scoured by broken dreams.

THE OTHER

Another consistent theme in horror is *The Other*. Perhaps humanity's oldest fear, we abhor the unknown and unfamiliar, continually excluding those unlike ourselves. Worse, we dread the isolation of existing outside communal norms. This fear forces us to cling to outdated concepts of community and safety, and why *The Other* features heavily throughout body horror and existential dread, as they thematically reveal our desperate need to be accepted.

Pre-Judged by Society: Society clings to the familiar and condemns otherness. People judge us on our beliefs, natures, and thoughts, justifying their responses to themselves. We push them down, hiding our true selves, lest we be ostracized. But we cannot hide our gender and ethnicity, which mark us as *different* – and thus potentially dangerous. We must contend with invisible boundaries and tangible threats, simply because we are who we are.

Alienated from Society: Communities and cultures define their membership, only accepting those they deem worthy. Many are forever denied basic human dignities and respect. They remain unwelcome, even by their own families, due to their religion, politics, sexuality, or social status. Their mere presence can create suspicion and tension, tearing whole communities apart.

No One Can be Trusted: In this harsh world, betrayal comes naturally to us all. Our personal needs outweigh honor and trust. Even our most cherished friends are mere pawns in the great game. You cannot trust anyone, as their open arms may conceal the blade, ready to slip into your back. Cynicism rules us, as we watch and worry that those closest to us are merely play actors; our love and trust are signs of weakness rather than strength.

Homogeny Reigns: We're told everyone is a unique and cherished individual. But this is a lie, obscuring the social and economic truth that individual expression is a threat. We must obey the status quo, succumbing to societal conformism and capitalist homogeny, until we become another faceless cog in the machinery. Otherness is frowned up, as it is a threat to order and normality. Those who ascend beyond the mundane must be removed, as they are thorns in society's flesh.

Traditions are Challenged: Once again, the established order has been challenged by new beliefs, social changes, or technological developments. Many embrace this new world, while others fight to retain their traditions. Which side triumphs in this cultural conflict, and how are they ultimately changed? Which side of this divide will be considered the *Other*?

Safety in the Familiar: Humanity finds safety in our communities and their familiar ways. We can identify threats by their differences to those with whom we share kinship. What steps will we take to retain this comfort and safety? Are we willing to accept others into it, allowing them to become one with the whole? And where will they go, if this foundation is denied them?

One With Your Heritage: When our heritage defines us as the Other, do we embrace or deny it? Our communities judge and define us by our inherent nature and social upbringing. If we can strip that from ourselves, do we seek comfort in lies and self-deception? How much of our heritage is worth sacrificing for cherished acceptance?

TESTS OF THE SOUL

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the concepts of good and evil are inherently flawed, as they are judgement based. Thematically exploring the philosophical differences between light and darkness provides an intriguing, narrative foundation for any story. Who has the right to determine what is right and wrong? When does justice become tyranny? Can the light destroy us and the darkness protect us? When does the 'greater good' outweigh the rights of the individual? What lines can we cross before we become what we fight against? This classical theme has resonated through human history, as it probes deeply at who we truly are.

Allure of Power: Those with power have blessed the greatest goods and inflicted the vilest evils upon humanity. Power can corrupt or elevate those who seek it, empowering their selfless responsibility or shameful avarice. Those without power remain indebted to those who possess it. Be they victims of circumstance or design, the powerful become covetous and resentful. What will they sacrifice to ascend? What will they become when they obtain it?

Unspeakable Darkness: Every day brings us fresh horrors. Human depravity dominates our media, while tragedies assail our daily lives. Unimaginable evils mock us, testing our souls with their imagery and truths. Even those who would protect us use their power to inflict pain. If no soul is innocent, where can we find the strength to overcome wickedness – or the callousness to ignore the suffering around us? Is humanity even worth saving?

Sworn by Honor: A person is only as good as their word. Honor defines who we are, and if we are worthy of trust. The oaths we make each day have meaning and importance. But what if we break that trust? If we draw our line, can circumstances free us to step over it? Does keeping one's promises redeem their deplorable acts? In the end, how much is one's honor worth?

In Search of Redemption: Our pasts are rife with sins and regrets. Guilt dwells in us all, inescapable and poisonous. Although time cannot heal these wounds, our future actions can. We can consciously decide to make what's wrong right again. But does accepting our past free us from our misdeeds? Are there things beyond forgiveness? How far can one go to redeem themselves, without committing new transgressions?

Morality of Shadows: Our civilization is held together by morals and philosophies, which seek to restrain our impulses. Yet, our world is one of endless cruelties and deceits. Many of these terrible acts are justified through our principles and righteousness. Yet, the truth lies somewhere between darkness and light. Do we have the conviction to look in those shadowy places? Are we strong enough to accept it when we are wrong?

THE HUMAN CONDITION

While desires, needs, and wants drive us, we are defined by our conscious actions. In turn, our behaviors affect those around us, shaping human existence as a whole. Within the conflicted realm where our ego and shadow dwell, we can narratively explore the human condition. This powerful theme resonates throughout ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, as the PCs seek self-enlightenment and understanding, forced to ask questions best left unanswered. Even when not the narrative focus, the human condition is intrinsic to most of the PCs' personal experiences.

Addiction and Compulsion: We are ruled by our desires and impulses, succumbing to our desperate urge for self-gratification. When these needs aren't filled emotionally or mentally, we seek them out elsewhere, indulging in illicit acts and exquisite luxuries. Drugs, gambling, sex, and violence fill the void inside, but only temporarily. We must seek them out again and again, falling deeper into their embrace.

Fear of Death/Damnation: Upon recognizing our own mortality, we are forever haunted by its inevitable arrival. While many ignore its presence, others seek to dull their fears through faith or extravagance. Others seek to escape it at any cost, extending their lives through exercise, medicine, and surgeries. Some even explore darker paths, seeking to regain some semblance of their immortality.

Lashing Out: Everybody is constantly victimized. We're all being oppressed and abused on a daily basis – many without even consciously realizing it, but many more who are very acutely aware of it happening. We become angry and paranoid, feeling every interaction as a fresh wound on top of deep-seated hurts. We lash out, seemingly irrationally, our anger justified, but in our blindness misdirected. Our aggression becomes like a drug that shields us from uncertainty, submission, and abject terror – even though it can also harm those we love.

Society Slowly Kills Us: Our modern lives are like a disease. All our obligations, the constant stress, the omnipresent technology slowly kills us. It is like small doses of rat poison being fed to us daily, and we are getting sicker and sicker. To escape it, we try to consume more rat poison since we are told that it is the cure, and further down we go.

Flames in the Darkness: Although the world appears dark and cruel, fragments of hope remain, illuminating the eternal night. Sporadic acts of generosity and kindness reawaken our souls, allowing us to believe in a better future. We may even push back against the darkness ourselves, giving comfort and solace to those who need it most. These acts may be in vain, but they define who we are.

Misdirected Goodness: The road to hell is paved with good intentions. What we deem as goodness may unleash unforeseen consequences for others – and ourselves. Forgiveness can be met with betrayal, kindness with maliciousness. We may save someone from cruelty only to condemn them to catastrophe. And once we've acted, even in the moment, they become our responsibility. Once saved, we cannot leave them to a worse fate.

CONFLICT

Since its earliest inceptions, humanity has never known peace. Humans are perpetually in a state of conflict, be it with each other, themselves, society, or their environment. These battles define us, revealing our triumphs and tragedies, honing our spirits and scouring our souls. Thematically, conflicts lie at the heart of every narrative, inspiring characters to overcome and persevere. However, they also reveal our inhumanity and willingness to sacrifice everything to succeed – even in a pyrrhic victory, just so we could say we won. From boardroom to blasted wasteland, the true battlefield lies within ourselves.

Inglorious Crusades: Few things drive us into conflict more than righteous belief. We sacrifice ourselves to fight for something greater than us. The enemy is clear in our minds and hearts. They must be crushed without hesitation or mercy, as they threaten our very way of life. Yet, what makes our beliefs more important than others? What are we truly fighting for and what really differs us from those who oppose us?

Ultimate Survival: We must overcome and survive at any cost. No matter the threat or the lack of resources we have, surrender is not an option. Every moment, every breath must be cherished and fought for. Our right to live isn't given to us, it must be earned with strength and suffering. Yet, when conflict sweeps us up, what are we willing to do to prevail? In the face of annihilation, can there be hope?

Inescapable Violence: No matter how we deny it, humanity thrives on conflict. Beneath our cultured veneers, we're still animals eager to fight. Sometimes, be it by choice or circumstance, we toss aside diplomacy and restraint. Tensions rise, hostilities escalate, and negotiations fail. Some people simply cannot be reasoned with. What a shame.

Vengeance is Mine: Some deeds can never be forgiven and must be avenged, no matter the personal cost. Our insufficient laws fail us, leaving the guilty to go unpunished. We're betrayed and wronged, left to suffer injustices without resolution. Only when we take retribution into our own hands can we find the closure we seek. Yet, violence begets violence, perpetuating the vicious cycle. And do we truly have the right to become judge, jury, and executioner?

Lingering Wounds: Violence scars our minds and souls, wounding us beyond recognition. Though our bodies may be healed, our minds remain tattered and bleeding. We perpetuate the violence inflicted upon us, harming others and ourselves. Soldiers are transformed into weapons, traumatized by unspeakable acts, only to be thrust back into normal society with minimal support. Those subjected to intense cruelties are forever changed. Our invisible wounds fester and rot, killing us silently.

Fighting Destiny: Fate defines and constraints us. We're taught that we cannot escape our destinies, and must surrender to the inevitable. Yet we fight against these forces daily, striving to reshape our set future. In this world, where everything is connected, is our struggle in vain? Deprived of our divinity, we are removed from our true destinies. Even if we break free and chase our own true visions, we all too often do so under false beliefs and fractured hopes. Still we insist that the future is not yet written...

RELATIONSHIPS

The individual is nothing without the whole. Humans are invariably social creatures, yearning to be accepted, understood, and loved. As such, *relationships* are thematically prevalent in horror, pushing characters to their greatest achievements and darkest crimes. Love can heal and wound with equal measure, inspiring our souls or poisoning our hearts. We may torture ourselves for impossible loves or sacrifice everything for friendship and communion. Few things define our true humanity more than those we hold dear.

Hellbound Hearts: Love and passion take many forms. They're defined by our needs and shaped (both fostered and restrained) by our society. How far can one go to obtain their desires? What pleasures are forbidden and urges suppressed? When does love become destructive, and anguish liberating? Is there a balance between pain and pleasure? And who can we trust enough to share in these experiences?

Destructive Passions: Desire, love, and passion are dangerous and all-consuming, driving us into obsession and madness. When denied our affections, we are distraught and wounded, crippled by feelings of loneliness and inadequacy. We fill the emptiness inside through destructive relationships and meaningless sex. When the heart rules the soul, we spiral down into pain and torment.

Love and Sacrifice: Love fills us with meaning, erases our psychic defenses, and allows us to be more than ourselves. Whether in the form of romantic love or true friendships, it creates the deepest bonds in our lives. It has no boundaries or judgment. It protects and empowers us. But this blessed connection also places tremendous burdens upon us. We lose our individuality, binding our souls with another person. To lose them is to lose part of ourselves. What sacrifices do we make to maintain this bond? What costs are we willing to pay?

Broken Bonds: Relationships and family bonds are continually tested and strained. Even the greatest loves know dissent and strife. Can we endure their hurtful words, even when spoken in loving truth? At what point do our faults outweigh their affections for us? How long do abuses go unanswered? What horrors lurk behind the picture-perfect facades of familial bliss? What prices do we pay to maintain that delusion?

Desperate Search for Affirmation: People need to feel loved and needed, to be accepted and acknowledged by others. Unable to believe in our own self-worth, we seek outside affirmation from family, friends, coworkers, social media, or even complete strangers. This desperate search can quickly become self-destructive, as we obliterate our own identity, acquiescing to other people's demands. We endure degradation and perform humiliating acts, solely to keep feeling desired and wanted.

Silently Reaching Out: In this quickened world, humanity has become faceless and impersonal. We're continually ignored, dismissed as another face in the crowd of thousands. Yet, even in this imposed seclusion, we silently scream to be released from the hollow lives, desperate for our suffering to be recognized. We gesture and plead to those around us, hoping they see our desperation to connect on a human level. Yet we still fear rejection and judgement, and willingly retreat back into the crowd where we cannot be hurt.

WRITING CAMPAIGNS

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, full-length campaigns involve intricate storylines, composed of linked scenarios and subplots spanning over many sessions. The campaign's conversation features recurring characters, themes, and plot-lines, all developing toward an ultimate resolution. Typically, *KULT* campaigns are divided into specific chapters (i.e., scenarios) presented through an *episodic* format. The GM may structure the episodes according to the narrative's specific needs, allowing them to evolve organically during the conversation. Furthermore, due to *KULT's* personalized nature, ongoing PC-specific character arcs are vital to campaigns, as they encourage player agency and investment. For this reason, the Intrigue Map is vital to maintaining any successful and unified campaign.

Preparation

Campaigns are involved affairs, usually requiring the GM's devoted time and effort prior to undertaking them. However, these initial preparations help the GM develop coherent stories and cohesive narratives. This also helps develop the foundations upon which the conversation rests, allowing the GM to effectively maintain its direction and momentum over several sessions. Preparation also allows GMs to develop and formulate the story's central plot elements, as well as figuring out where to take the story. Using the following list, the GM can begin fleshing out specific details prior to running the game's first session (see ***Prologue***, p. 44). In turn, the players can use this information to better develop their PCs, so they fit more naturally into the overall campaign.

[1] Develop the campaign's **High Concept**.

[2] Outline the campaign's **Atmosphere**.

[3] Outline the campaign's primary **Setting**.

[4] Outline the campaign's **Backstory**.

[5] Develop the campaign's **Low Concept**.

[6] Outline the campaign's **Story Milestones**.

[7] Consider possible **Resolutions** for the campaign.

[8] Prepare and run the **Prologue**.

[9] Utilizing notes from the prologue, sketch out the **Intrigue Map**.

As the GM grows more comfortable with this process, she should feel free to complete the sections as she see fit, as these steps are narratively intertwined and meant to inspire one another. This prevents the GM's progress from losing the creative momentum by specifically focusing on any one section.

In the examples below, the GM wants her campaign to explore the concepts and themes of cyberpunk horror. As such, she begin developing its *atmosphere* first, drawing upon various inspirations from literature and movies.

HIGH CONCEPT

The *high concept* establishes the overall concept and purpose for the campaign's narrative. Much like an elevator pitch, this premise should be easily explained in *one to three sentences*, yet be unique and compelling enough to inspire the audience. The GM may initially consider strong character Archetypes and narrative themes to accent the high concept. She may also wish to create tentative names for the campaign, which can help solidify the idea.

A common technique for developing the high concept is asking the question, What If? The GM develops the story from their answer, expanding the concept into a coherent narrative structure. For example, the iconic campaign ***The Black Madonna*** essentially asks the question: *What if the Death Angel Chagidiel manifested in the crumbling Soviet Union*? The complex narrative evolves from this basic question, providing the overall setting and tone, as well as establishing various plot elements and story arcs. GMs can develop their campaign in a similar fashion, expanding simple questions far beyond the initial concept.

Once the GM has her initial high concept, she can begin discussing the idea with their players, asking for input and insight. She should not be afraid of 'spoiling' her idea, as this exchange is to promote player excitement and involvement. The GM may request players' wishlists of what they'd like to experience, adding these details to the *Horror Contract*. If the players do not express genuine interest, then the GM may wish to reassess the campaign's high concept and adjust accordingly. This helps her structure the campaign to maximize player investment.

Fleshing It Out

The GM incorporates her basic premise and player's input to begin personalizing the campaign. This is also the perfect time for collecting inspirational material from movies, books, games, and the internet. Building upon the initial concept, the GM begins jotting down keywords, ideas, and plot elements. Although these notes may never be used, they'll serve as fuel for the GM's creativity and lay the developmental groundwork. In particular, they should answer some of the following questions:

- What aspects of the high concept compels them the most?
- What do they want the campaign to look and feel like?
- What sort of stories do they want to tell?
- What themes do they wish to explore?
- What are the main conflicts driving the story?
- Who are the antagonists and major NPCs?
- What aspects of ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** intrigue them most?

Most importantly, the GM must sell *herself* on the high concept! If she aren't invested in the campaign's ideas and narratives, her dissatisfaction will translate to the players as well. Campaigns are extended affairs, so generating excitement now will help maintain their energy later. This enthusiasm will resonate throughout the creation process, as well as over numerous sessions to come. In short, they should be able to explain, *Why would someone want to invest their time and effort into playing this campaign*?

Interested in Limbo, the GM decides to explore the Realm of Dreams; specifically, the Greek Myth of the Oneiroi. Older than the Olympians and Titans, these deities were born from the primordial darkness and shaped humanity's dreams. She wants the campaign to have surreal qualities, where reality and dreams merge regularly. This concept works well with her players' current interest in web-related creepy-pastas and the Dark Net. From these ideas, they establish the *high concept*, *What if the Oneiroi returned to our world through the Internet?* She tentatively name the campaign, ***The Phantasos Project***.

ATMOSPHERE

In addition to their *high concept*, campaigns are best defined by their *atmosphere*. This stylistic framework reflects the narrative's mood, themes, and tone, and helps establish the game's overall appearance. From these details, the GM can develop the campaign's aesthetics and emotional resonance, establishing the foundations for Environmental Storytelling and character development. In turn, these atmospheric details feed directly into developing the campaign's *setting* and *low concept*, which also help shape its overall fiction. Perhaps more importantly, atmosphere establishes the campaign's uniqueness.

Atmosphere, and how to effectively employ it in-game, is discussed in greater detail in ***Pillars of the False Heaven*** (p. 106). ***Book Two: Atmosphere*** (p. 150) provides inspiration for introducing atmospheric themes in five specific genres: *existential horror*, *body horror*, *extreme horror*, *surreal horror*, and *psychological horror*. Finally, ***Book Three: Reflections*** (p. 232) outlines how these different milieus can be used in alternative settings.

Theme

Every campaign should explore at least one major overarching *theme*, as well as introduce several minor ones throughout its divergent narratives. The major theme should be directly associated with the *high concept*, helping to accentuate its core ideas. This theme should be interesting and engaging, as it will guide how the campaign narratively progresses, as well as inspire its significant plot elements, such as NPCs, creatures, and Influences, and setting.

During the campaign, the GM should introduce at least two to five additional minor themes, which can be woven into the different scenarios and/or character arcs. These can be presented individually or used to accent and/or contrast the campaign's minor themes. For example, the campaign's main theme is *Family versus Society*, exploring how familial bonds can conflict with societal norms. The GM also includes the theme of *Honor Above All Else*, detailing how an NPC's personal honor affects his familial responsibilities.

In ***The Phantasos Project***, the GM and players want to explore the existential theme of *Illusion versus reality*, and more specifically, how the Internet and social media blur one's beliefs and perceptions of reality. They briefly make notes on additional themes, such as *Addiction*, *Beliefs*, *Community*, *Conformity*, and *Self-image*. Each of these will accent the main theme, exploring its concepts from different perspectives.

Mood/Tone

In addition to *theme*, *mood* and *tone* help define the campaign's general atmosphere. Mood reflects the overall ambience of the setting and its characters, seeking to invoke an emotional response from the players. As such, mood can be very genre-specific, representing various milieus of horror, such as extreme, quiet, and uncanny. From this aesthetic foundation, the GM can begin framing the campaign's narrative elements and story arcs. As the setting's appearance and backstory develop from the campaign's mood, this also plays heavily into ***Environmental Storytelling*** (p. 107).

Similarly, tone reflects how the campaign is presented during the conversation, most usually by the GM. This can be far more subjective and even conflict with the established mood. For example, although the campaign's mood focuses on crime noir, the GM presents its tone as comical – so the gritty nature is played lighthearted and for laughs, rather than being somber and serious. This juxtaposition can create stark contrasts in the campaign's ambience and how the game is played.

The GM wants ***The Phantasos Project*** to have an uncanny, phantasmagorical mood to it. This feeds into the theme, *Illusion versus reality*, where the lines between perception and dream are never certain. She also decides upon a darker, realistic tone, reflecting the story's horrific and unforgiving nature. The interaction between mood and tone helps ground the campaign's surrealistic mood, adding narrative weight to its more fantastical moments.

SETTING

Drawing from the high concept and atmosphere, the GM now develops the campaign's overall *setting*. This establishes the campaign's initial locations, as well as outlines the main NPCs and threats that exist in that narrative space. She can involve the players in this development process, asking for their preferences and suggestions. Together, they determine to develop their own setting or use one from the real world – or uniquely combining the two. In either case, the setting must be narratively significant to the campaign.

For example, a campaign where PCs seek out Gaia's horrors and secrets could be set in Norway's Rollagsfjell, the Australian Outback, or the Hawaiian Islands. Each of these distinct locations would have their own atmosphere and unique stories, reflecting the high concept in vastly different ways. Setting is discussed further in ***Pillars of the False Heaven*** (p. 106).

Scope

As campaigns offer tremendous narrative freedom, the GM should first establish the setting's scope. This helps determine the campaign's most prominent locations and places, as well as its cultural milieu. No matter how large or small the setting's scope, the campaign's heart must revolve around the PCs and their stories. As such, grander settings may present some difficulties for maintaining ***KULT: Divinity Lost***'s more personalized narratives. Campaigns generally focus on one of three scopes – *Local*, *Regional*, and *Global* – or a combination thereof.

Local settings focus around specific or restricted locations, ranging from singular structures to small cities. These campaigns are highly PC-centric, involving limited casts of NPCs, monsters, and organizations. Although the setting may appear constrained, roleplaying opportunities are more focused, allowing for greater intimacy and player investment. In turn, this creates more tension, as the stakes become increasingly real and closer to home. Familiarity accentuates the importance of the PCs' every action and relationship, resonating throughout their immediate surroundings. This narrative feedback further accentuates the setting's sense of realism, drawing the players deeper into the roleplaying experience.

> The GM sets the campaign in Whitehorse, Yukon, located in northern Canada. Its localized stories revolve around the city's secluded nature and tight-knit community, surrounded on all sides by pristine wilderness. She also wishes to explore the city's cultural, social, and environmental dynamics, as well as incorporating local legends.

Regional settings expand the narrative's scale beyond the singular location to include several geographical areas, such as counties, provinces, and even countrywide. Although the PCs likely congregate around one shared location, they frequently travel elsewhere to address the campaign's various story arcs. Furthermore, campaign events should have regional consequences, affect larger populations, and hold greater stakes than those in localized campaigns.

> The GM's campaign revolves around the Free State of Bavaria in southern Germany. Its regional stories revolve around Bavaria's political and national identity, playing heavily into the historical events surrounding its existence as the Kingdom of Bavaria. The PCs will continually travel throughout the countryside and various cities, dealing with different governmental and supernatural organizations.

Global settings expand the narrative even farther, incorporating much of – if not all – the world itself. The PCs will rarely remain in one location for very long, continually traveling between countries to deal with various threats and challenges. On this scale, the adversaries possess wide-ranging powers and resources, and the campaign's backstory will be complex, possibly stretching back decades, maybe even centuries. More importantly, the characters' successes and failures can have worldwide ramifications, where actions resonate throughout Elysium.

> The GM's campaign revolves around an international network of arms dealers, who seek to summon the Death Angel Hareb-Serap into our world. The PCs must travel to several key regions on different continents to prevent various schemes, as well as seal the portals to the Death Angel's Citadel. Although they share the same narrative thread, the campaign's different stories reflect their particular region.

As the scope increases, GMs will need to invest additional time and effort for pregame development. She must also be ready to cope with prolonged periods of game-play and potential player burnout. As such, it's perhaps best to break larger campaigns into digestible chunks, focusing on specific areas and threats, interwoven with an underlying narrative arc. Also, due to their broad strokes and grand storylines, regional and global campaigns may lose aspects of personal horror, which diminishes the essence of ***KULT: Divinity Lost***. The GM must still focus on the PCS' character arcs, and make sure they aren't overshadowed by the campaign's far-reaching events.

> The GM decides to present *The Phantasos Project* on the global scope, as the characters travel across the world and fall deeper into the murky world of the Dark Net, dangerous hackers, and augmented realities. Beginning in Hong Kong, the campaign expands across Asia, Africa, and Europe, where the Oneiroi are expanding their influence amongst different groups and organizations.

Otherworldly Elements

The GM should also take the campaign's *otherworldly* aspects into consideration. If Metropolis, Inferno, and Limbo are introduced, their plot implications can be both vast and personal, featuring far-reaching consequences with the characters in the eye of the storm. The PCs may be forced to venture between realms, where their actions may directly affect reality itself, as they'll be dealing with the fundamental framework of the Illusion and beyond. This includes rediscovering their own divinity and their place in the cosmic scheme of things. The GM should list the Moves associated with these realms, as well as their inhabitants.

> In *The Phantasos Project*, the GM knows that Limbo plays an integral part of the campaign's setting. As such, the PCs will frequently travel between dreams and reality, traversing abandoned and renewed dream-worlds. Additionally, the GM wants to introduce aspects of Inferno, which are invading the Dark Net, as well as the Archon Tipareth's Citadel. These different areas will introduce intriguing opportunities for exploration and role-play.

BACKSTORY

The campaign's *backstory* outlines the background information relevant to the current storyline. Initially, these details may be sparse, as the GM begins fleshing out the relevant events, NPCs, and Influences involved. She may also wish to incorporate the PCs' histories into this backstory; preferably tying them to different plot points. As the campaign develops, the GM can return to the backstory and flesh out its narrative aspects. However, she should establish the general timeline to some degree before moving forward, as this serves as the story's historical foundation.

> In *The Phantasos Project*, the Oneiroi were inadvertently summoned onto the Dark Net by users sharing pornography and other illicit material. Feeding off this Passion energy, the forgotten deities begin reaching out, incorporating their dream realms into various websites and shared data. The three most powerful – Morpheus, Phobetor, and Phantasos – formed anonymous cults across the internet. These international cybergroups began sharing their information and resources, jointly seeking to shatter the Illusion. Although the Archon Tipareth was alerted to these efforts, the Oneriroi continued to expand their global influence.

The GM should also establish the campaign's major threats, listing them as hubs on the Intrigue Map. In particular, the most important NPCs and Influences should be detailed, as they'll drive the narrative's natural progression. Once the first session begins, the GM can incorporate some (or all) of these threats into the PCs' backgrounds.

> In *The Phantasos Project*, the Oneiroi are the main threats, as well as their individual cults and manipulated organizations. The GM develops this intricate network of hackers, researchers, and zealots. She also outlines an Interpol cybercrime unit, which specifically answers to lictors of the Archon Tipareth. Finally, the GM notes down an independent group of white hat hackers who have stumbled upon these terrifying implications.

LOW CONCEPT

The *low concept* deals directly with the campaign's mechanical aspects, including any changes to its Agendas and Principles. In addition, this incorporates narrative details related to the campaign's fiction and the *atmosphere* and *setting*. This process also helps differentiate the group's campaign by defining the genres, story concepts, and themes they wish to explore. Inspirations for fully developed low concepts can be found in ***Reflections*** (p. 232).

Firstly, the GM needs to determine which character Archetypes best reflect the campaign's narrative. In short, some Archetypes will not logically fit and/or be disruptive to the overall premise. For example, more combat-oriented characters may find their role diminished in quiet, sedate stories, while academic characters may have difficulty keeping up in fast-paced, violent stories. If the campaign focuses on mundane horrors, where supernatural aspects are extremely rare, then Archetypes like *The Cursed*, *The Descendant*, and *The Occultist* may not fit. The GM should also consider what Advantages, Disadvantages, and Dark Secrets don't fit into the campaign's conversation. Everyone at the table should discuss these restrictions, and the GM should help players adjust their character concepts accordingly.

Secondly, the GM needs to determine which – if any – Agendas and Principles need to be added, adjusted, or removed to best reflect the narrative atmosphere and setting. As above, these should be framed to properly reflect and inspire the campaign's fiction. For example, the Agenda, *Tear Back the Illusion to Reveal the True Reality Behind It*, does not fit into campaigns that specifically shy away from supernatural horrors. Instead, the GM amends this to *Maintain the Illusion, Yet Allude To Its Existence. Conversely*, campaigns that involve daily intrusions from the Higher Powers may add the Principle *No One is Free from Corruption*, reflecting the ever-present Influences.

> In *The Phantasos Project*, the GM wants the campaign to focus on low-level conspiracies, combat-light encounters, and tech-savvy role-playing. As such, she request the player group include at least one *Seeker* Archetype – or to have the ***Access the Dark Net*** and/or ***Hacking*** Advantages. Because of the campaign's uncanny nature, the GM decides to incorporate the Agenda and Principles from the reflection, ***Darkness and Decay*** (p. 240).

STORY MILESTONES

Due to their narrative complexity and length, most campaigns cannot be sustained without some initial structure. This roadmap becomes increasingly important in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, which heavily relies on collaborative storytelling and encourages organic story progression. Over extended periods, this style of roleplaying can potentially meander or lose narrative focus, leading to confusion and burn-out – both for the GM and the players.

As such, the GM needs to know the campaign's general direction ahead of time, so she can plan and direct its progress toward an inevitable – and logical – resolution. As with scenarios, the GM can establish *story milestones* to promote dynamic plot structure in the campaign. Much like chapters/episodes, these milestones provide narrative waypoints for the GM to channel the story and character arcs. This plot structure also helps the GM roughly gauge where the group is in the overarching campaign; adjusting the story and downtime accordingly.

For *The Phantasos Project*, the GM incorporates the dynamic plot structure. For the *Hook*, the PCs learn that one of their **Relations** is found dead of fright, after receiving online videos of themselves asleep. At the *First Crisis*, the PCs begin receiving the same videos and suffering nightmares. By *Midpoint*, the PCs realize they're marked for death; part of an ever-expanding curse spreading through the Internet. They must travel across the globe to close the Dream Portals before they die or go insane. At the *Second Crisis*, Limbo and reality begin merging. The Dream Princes manifest and surreality spreads through major cities. Having reached the *Black Moment*, the PCs are physically pulled into Limbo, seemingly outwitted by the antagonists.

RESOLUTIONS

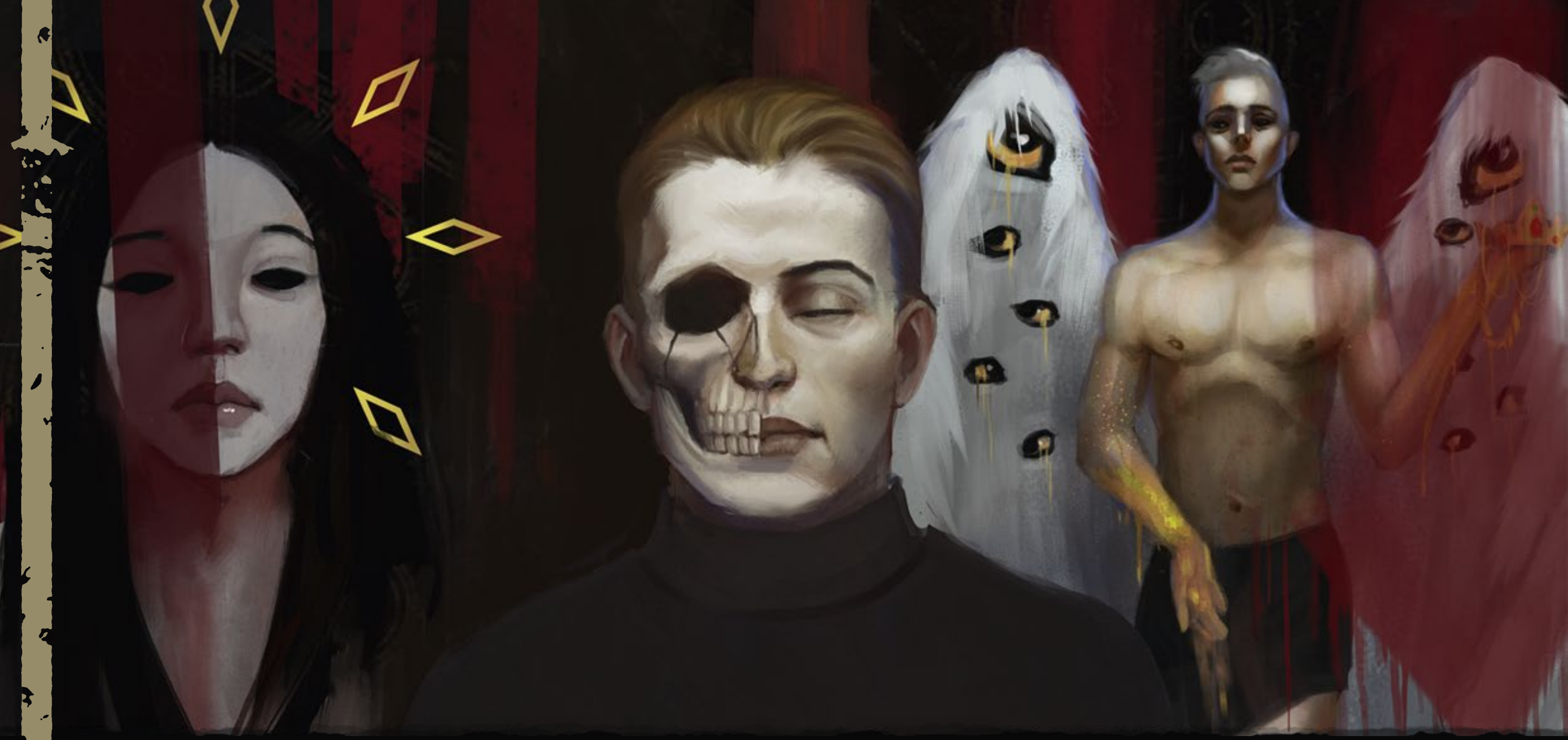
Although some traditional RPGs feature potentially unending stories, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** campaigns are best served by culminating with some distinct narrative resolution. As such, the GM should consider possible outcomes for the campaign, establishing an end-point to work towards. This process provides direction for establishing the campaign's *story milestones*, as the GM can roughly see where the underlying narrative should head. Finally, this also helps determine the campaign's approximate real-time length and adjust accordingly, as to avoid overly long stories and prevent loss of player interest.

For ***The Phantasos Project***, the GM notes that the campaign will conclude with either a) Limbo and Elysium permanently merging or b) the PCs closing the Dream Portals. This will involve overcoming the Dream Princes and their minions at five locations world-wide; each with different story arcs. They estimate this will involve roughly seven to eight 'chapters,' each one to two sessions long – possibly more, depending on player character arcs.

PROLOGUE AND FINALIZING THE CAMPAIGN

The GM and players now play their first session, as outlined in the core rules (*KDL*, p. 172). As the general setting should be established, the group can utilize this session to fully develop the PCs and expand the campaign's important plot elements, such as locations and NPCs. They may wish to role-play *prologue* scenes together, which can better explain their personal connections with one another and important NPCs. Players roll for Dark Secrets and Disadvantages; the GM adds the results to their notes. The GM then uses this information to complete the campaign's Intrigue Map. This may require her to make adjustments to one or more of the previous steps, fleshing them out to best fit the group's collective vision of the game and *Horror Contract*.

For *The Phantasos Project's* prologue, the GM and players spend their time creating the PCs and roleplaying small scenes to establish their rapport. Together, they decide the PCs are all connected at their favorite Internet cafe, developing the shop, surrounding neighborhood, and several key NPCs associated with them. The GM decides one of these NPCs will be the unfortunate victim of the Dream Plague. The story starts with their plea for help to the PCs.



CHAPTER 3

FLESH AND SOUL

Harris stirred his spicy noodles, struggling to rediscover his appetite. After the funeral, the paltry collection of mourners had retreated here. Carol's favorite haunt, the pho shop seemed an appropriate place to honor her memory. He glanced around the table at his so-called friends. Divergent lives, conflicting personalities. All brought together by Carol's magnetic presence. Distant planets orbiting their shared sun. With that sun gone, they were cast adrift.

Now, they seemed like complete strangers. Yammering on about ghosts and demons. And how they'd taken Carol. Harris knew her interest in the Otherworld. Her strange obsessions and stories, chasing urban legends beneath the streets. But his friends too? They carried on as if they truly believed what they were saying. It bordered on insanity. He'd humor them today and then never look back. His connection to them had died with her.

Harris's gaze drifted out the shop window, scanning the mulling masses beyond. He flinched, nearly upending his food. Across the street, Carol stared back at him. Naked, pale. Autopsy marks bisecting her delicate body. Hollow holes where blue eyes once resided. She raised a long finger to crimson lips. Shhhhhhhhh...

OVERVIEW

Flesh and Soul provides the gamemaster (GM) inspiration for developing believable non-player characters (NPCs), and weaving them into their narratives. This includes incorporating *contact* and *leader* Hubs into the Intrigue Map. In addition, the chapter discusses Relations and how these important relationships can be woven into character and story arcs. Finally, *group* and *organization* Hubs are further explained, including suggestions for developing intriguing cults. Inhuman NPCs, such as supernatural entities and monsters, are detailed in Chapter Five, *Arcana and Apparitions* (p. 132).

A PANTHEON OF MORTALS

At its heart, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** is a human experience, where the player characters (PCs) explore their personal horrors and traumas. While the GM can create intricate plots and detailed settings, any narrative framework remains hollow and unrealistic without compelling NPCs for the players to encounter. Character interactions drive the conversation, revealing as much about the PCs as it does about their world. These personal connections and relationships bind the PCs to others, as well as investing the players more deeply in the narrative. As such, the GM continually needs to develop and portray realistic NPCs, many times creating them from scratch. This can be accomplished by establishing two important qualities – the NPC's *narrative role* and their *character complexity*. From these narrative foundations, the GM can further develop the NPC's overall physical and personal qualities, known as their ***Flesh and Soul*** (see p. 76).

Narrative Role

From the lowliest contact to the deadliest adversary, every NPC possesses their own desires, hopes, and dreams. It is the GM's duty to bring these characters to life, Assigning motivations to each, and portraying them as unique individuals. In doing so, their personal interactions and relationships with the PCs become more interesting and realistic, enhancing the conversation and overall campaign.

Most NPCs encountered throughout the game will be considered *Tertiary Characters* (p. 80), acting as story elements to accent and/or advance the conversation. Beyond this, they do not require fully formed qualities, as they'll contribute little beyond this simplistic role. In essence, they serve as narrative supports to hold up the story and make the setting more authentic.

However, some NPCs represent vital relationships in the PCs' lives, known as contacts and leaders. Due to their narrative significance, each important contact and leader should be incorporated through specific character roles: Antagonist, Confidante, Foil, Mentor, Romantic Interest, or Symbol. These help establish the NPC's goals and motivations throughout the story. Although they may not directly interact with the PCs, their actions affect the PCs and their lives. Over time, *Tertiary* characters may also evolve into one of these narrative roles, as well as establishing themselves on the Intrigue Map.

CONTACTS & LEADERS

Although portrayed through specific narrative roles, contacts and leaders also represent significant narrative elements within the overall story. As such, the GM needs to be aware of this distinction when establishing her position and links on the Intrigue Map. Indeed, they may be directly tied to the PCs' **Advantages**, **Disadvantages**, or **Dark Secrets**, influencing the story in several ways.

Contacts represent important relationships in the PCs' lives, such as allies, friends, and family, and **Relations**. Within the Intrigue Map, this association/relationship directly connects the PC to other narrative hubs. While most of these interactions are positive, the contact's motivations may be at odds with the PC and evolve over time.

Leaders are NPCs that actively affect the plot in their own way, working to fulfill their personal goals and expand their influences. While they may or may not interact directly with the PCs, each leader's actions and motivations continually affect the narrative's progression. This usually requires the PCs to respond in some fashion, altering their personal actions and beliefs. Leader also may request personal favors and/or make demands of the PCs, thus furthering the plot.

No matter their narrative role, the easiest differentiation between the two hub types is that contacts influence the *characters*, whereas leaders influence the *story*. This is also reflected in their potential threats, such as GM Moves and Bombs. Depending on the PCs' actions and/or narrative events, these NPCs may make distinct **Reactions** (see p. 64).

THE ANTAGONIST

Antagonists oppose the PCs' goals throughout the story, be it directly or indirectly. In either case, their narrative actions always have substantial consequences for the PCs. Their purpose within the story can be multifaceted, forcing the PCs into various dilemmas. Indeed, antagonists should help reveal the PCs' weaknesses, causing them physical, mental, and emotional harm. Most stories are only as interesting as their antagonist, so the GM should make them as captivating, compelling, and dangerous as possible. However, do not mistakenly overshadow the PCs – this is *their* story, not the antagonist's.

Although dangerous, the antagonist's actions should not be purely malicious, ruthless, and/or without purpose. Otherwise, the NPC will come across as unrealistic and one-dimensional. Furthermore, do not rely on binary concepts like good versus evil. Antagonists have compelling motivations and backgrounds, which directly influence their decisions. Ultimately, if the players can feel empathy and understand for the antagonist, the NPC will become more terrifying. Indeed, the antagonist/PC relationship should remain narratively complex, rather than them simply serving as obstacles.

The Doll's ***Stalker*** strives to destroy his life, spreading gossip to unscrupulous tabloid magazines, and undermining important relationships. They've stolen *The Doll's* personal items, taped and manipulated conversations, photographed him at his worst moments, and hacked his social media to impersonate him. When these emotional landmines blow up, *the Stalker* is close by to record them.

The Artist was rejected by her muse – a handsome, manipulative man that twisted her heart (***Victim of Passion***). He knows this, playing upon her emotions, savoring the anguish his refusals and insults have on her. He critically shreds her art, saying that she'll never be good enough to capture his beauty.

The Ronin's former boss raised him from the streets, acting as his mother figure. The boss continually pressures him into performing questionable hits; compensation for all her previous assistance. When guilt and manipulation don't work, the boss sends a new protégée to cause *The Ronin* trouble.

The Academic's research has attracted unwanted attention. A narcissistic rival seeks to discredit his work, believing only their theories are correct. Indeed, the rival recognizes *The Academic's* superior knowledge, and is driven mad by this. They publicly attack the PC's work, undermine professional relationships, and even steal his research.

The Agent gained ***Forbidden Knowledge*** of his superior's corruption during an assignment. The power-hungry officer seeks to destroy him and his reputation, desperate to cover up his involvement with unnatural forces.

THE CONFIDANTE

Confidante NPCs are the PC's intimates and devotees. They reward and strengthen the PC's personal virtues, as well as reveal and address their frailties. They serve to comfort and confront the PC. They consistently serve as the PC's emotional sanctuary – through good or ill – allowing him to evolve into something better. During game and downtime, the GM may allow the PC to regain **Stability** after interacting with his Confidante.

However, this devotion doesn't come without its limits and costs. Confidantes will not sacrifice who they are for the PC, and even the deepest friendship can be tested over time. Indeed, perpetually betrayed confidantes can eventually become the PC's foil, as the relationship devolves into antagonism. Similarly, the NPC may expect some emotional support in return, as no one is without their limits.

The Scientist, once ***Responsible for Medical Experiments***, created an intelligent and loyal creature. This entity has become their closest confidante, bridging the emotional gap they suffer with normal humans.

The Drifter, despite his wayward nature, remained friends with the truck stop's owner. In many ways, the timeless woman has become his anchor to society, offering him advice and solace whenever he travels through – adding +1 to ***Wanderer*** rolls.

The Detective befriended the trumpet player during an old case. He takes her in whenever she succumbs to her alcoholism, maintaining his spare room above the jazz club for her. She considers him 'safe,' due to his lack of romantic interest.

The Avenger continually goes to the old priest, who still maintains a mostly abandoned church in the dying neighborhood. Be it seeking acknowledgement or redemption, *The Avenger* pours out his anger and doubt to the old man.

The Cursed met the witch while buying ritualistic herbs and items. Now, he works at the woman's occult store, doing readings for clients. They frequently talk late into the night, sharing their hopes and fears.

THE FOIL

Whereas the antagonist's actions drive story arcs, the foil's actions compel character arcs. In many ways, this NPC is the PC's antithesis, mirroring his positive and negative qualities, and representing what he could ascend or devolve into. As such, the GM should examine the PC's Advantages and Disadvantages when developing the foil. They may be the PC's friendliest competitor or his deadliest rival, contrasting the PC's personal story by challenging his personal beliefs. Indeed, the foil/PC relationship typically evolves over time, as they test and push one another – possibly even becoming intimates.

As they're intrinsically bound to the PC's development, foils are well-rounded and highly dynamic NPCs. The GM can create an intriguing juxtaposition by having the foil progress positively, while the PC regresses negatively, succumbing to their flaws.

The Fixer is ***Greedy*** and frequently takes unnecessary risks to achieve his goals. In contrast, his ***Competitor*** possesses far more restraint, allowing them to expand their influence and wealth with fewer overt complications.

The Doll, an ***Object of Desire***, gains the attention of powerful people with little effort. A bitter rival who lacks his natural beauty and grace has an uncanny ability to manipulate situations to their advantage. Once *The Doll* is undermined, the rival struggles to perform in *The Doll's* stead.

The Veteran refused to follow out their orders and execute civilian leaders. A former squad member, his ***Stalker***, not only carried out the order, but hates *The Veteran* for being cowardly and disloyal.

The Descendant turned his back on his familial legacy, unwilling to sell his soul to unholy powers. A jealous cousin embraced the ***Chosen*** PC's mantle, paving the way for Inferno's legions.

The Broken, a ***Drug Addict***, continually succumbs to despair, unable to pull himself from the darkness. Strict, regimented, and arrogant, his former councillor has chosen to punish him for this weakness.

THE MENTOR

The mentor represents the PC's potential – an NPC who has undergone trials and tribulations and now shares those experiences with them. Their breadth of knowledge and insight also helps serve the narrative; they provide the PCs with information and resources they might not otherwise have. Unlike the confidante, the mentor operates from the position of power, rather than as an equal. Despite the mentor's apparent benevolence, the GM should always ask, "Why are they helping the PCs?" Indeed, the mentor's motivation may be using the PCs to achieve their own nefarious goals, such as obtaining power or revenge.

The Occultist talks with the thing on the other side of the deep crack in the wall beneath the library, and has done so since childhood. Feeding his ***Thirst for Knowledge***, it tells him many secret things: some wondrous, some terrible.

The Ronin learned his skills from their ***Weapon Master***, who served several government agencies over the years. The retired assassin now runs *The Ronin*, providing him with work, as well as continuing his relentless training.

The Artist, a nature photographer, constantly explores the wilderness where he's connected with a survivalist. She teaches him the Old Ways, as well as exposing him to Gaia's borderlands.

The Academic still consults with his former professor, who went on permanent sabbatical, following their psychotic break. He takes them food and necessities, in exchange for access to their library and notes (***Academic Network***).

The Careerist entered into a ***Pact with Dark Powers*** with *The Thing in the Corner Office*. In exchange for their services, it instructs him how to move up the corporate ladder. Occasionally, he must endure humiliating 'tests of loyalty.'

THE ROMANTIC INTEREST

No matter its form, love is a powerful thing. The romantic interest can have the most profound effect on the PCs, changing them in numerous ways. From unrequited affections to grotesque obsessions, from fiery passions to somber devotions, the romantic interest's love should bring out the best and worst in the PC. They can break their romantic partner apart or put them back together, inspire them to greatness or condemn them to infinite sorrow.

Because of this NPC's importance, the GM should make them as *real* as possible – they'll have foibles, conflicting motivations, and personal desires. Love is complicated, and passions are rife with dangers. Indeed, love and desires feature heavily in horror narratives, exposing our vulnerable souls and tearing them apart.

The Agent saved the romantic interest from an abusive situation. Despite their continued affections for one another, this shared history actually keeps them apart. The interest remains broken from their experience, and *The Agent* fears their overly protective feelings.

The Deceiver has met someone he doesn't want to manipulate or swindle. He want that person to believe in him and truly win their heart, but his checkered history and old habits stand in their way to finding happiness.

The Seeker begins an online relationship, pouring his life and love into the ether. In time, he notice unusual things regarding his romantic interest. They never want to physically meet or communicate, preferring to remain solely in the digital world.

The Criminal's interest for his confidante evolves into romantic feelings. Unfortunately, he still doesn't entirely trust her, as she continues to her nefarious ways. As their affections deepen, this issue has become increasingly divisive.

The Cursed became ***Bound*** to an ethereal entity, while trapped on the Other Side. Their strange relationship has deepened profoundly. Now, passions and yearning have strained the confines of their otherworldly connection. Its alien nature makes other relationships difficult, as it subtly sequesters him from 'lesser' beings.

THE SYMBOL

An 'advanced' role, the symbol character specifically embodies the story's themes and underlying message. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, they may directly reflect one of the Principles, such as Allure or Torment, or the various realms, such as Death or Passion. Their presence within the narrative reveals these viewpoints to the players, even if they may not make the connection until afterwards. Although they may also fall under another NPC role, their core purpose remains thematic throughout the narrative. As such, GMs should use these NPCs cautiously, as they may be trite, if handled poorly.

The Awakened – Having cut off his eyelids and ingested arcane drugs, *The Awakened* now suffers profound insomnia. His aberrant condition causes him to perpetually drift between Elysium and Limbo. He represents Malkuth's Principle, *Awakening*, as he can never sleep again.

The Dutiful – Despite his torments, the Dutiful persists in his abusive relationship without complaint. He expects similar compliance from his children, forcing them to adhere to antiquated concepts, while shunning those who do not comply. He represents the story's theme of *Duty Above Self*.

The Fallen – The once-revered and respected scientist now lives on the streets, shunned and lost to his obsessions. He spends each day writing quantum formulas, trying to reopen the pathway to the Beyond. He represents the *Daedalus/Icarus allegory*; his research resulted in his son's seeming obliteration by heavenly light.

The Ignored – An orphan and foster child, the Ignored drifts through life like human flotsam. Now he lives on the streets, overlooked and disregarded, desperate to survive. The Illusion weaves itself through his flesh, slowly erasing him from human consciousness, piece by piece. He reflects the theme of *Abandonment*.

The Echo – The sole survivor of a terrorist attack, the Echo's survivor's guilt has driven them into madness. Believing they carry the souls of the fallen with them, they began impersonating the dead people. Their body frequently transforms to match the 'fallen' person's appearance. They represent the theme of *Memory*.

THE TERTIARY CHARACTER

The most prevalent NPC Archetype, tertiary characters populate much of the game-world, but have minimal influence on the main storyline. Even so, they can still serve various functions, interacting with the PCs in personal ways. However, unless the players identify their narrative importance, the GM shouldn't develop these NPCs beyond the most rudimentary qualities, i.e., their *Flesh and Soul*. Generally, tertiary characters should have one *outstanding quality* or *trait* to make them memorable and realistic. As their role expands, they can be fleshed out and further incorporated into the fiction – potentially being added to the Intrigue Map.

The Newsgirl – No matter the time of day, the purple-haired girl tends her newsstand on the corner. She always saves one paper for the PC, and has insight into local rumors.

The Travel Writer – A travel columnist, the writer can always be found at the coffee shop's bar. His history book has taken him years, never ending for one reason or another.

The Mechanic – A rugged beauty, the mechanic works on restoring vintage cars and old machinery. Her limp is pronounced, it's an injury from her military tour.

The Nurse – Working at the downtown clinic, he tries to help the homeless and those in need. Witnessing so much suffering has hardened him.

The Night Security Guard – Stuck guarding a milk-processing plant, he's constantly sitting in his booth, reading. He has an encyclopedic mind, but lacks any form of ambition.

Character Complexity

Once an NPC's role is established, the GM should consider their character complexity, i.e., how multifaceted their personality is. Regardless of their Archetype, most NPCs possess either **Distinct** and **Dynamic** personalities. Generally, the greater narrative importance NPC holds, the more complex their personality should be. This narrative framework helps the GM portray the NPC in-game, as well as provides the foundation for developing the NPC. Typically, the more dynamic the NPC is, the more detailed the NPC's Flesh and Soul should become.

DISTINCT PERSONAS

Distinct NPCs are two-dimensional and exhibit the most basic qualities of their personality type (p. 86 Indeed, they may act in stereotypical fashions and have one character motivation throughout the story. In many ways, they are the spear-carriers, the stock characters, and the window-dressing that complements the setting. As such, their *Flesh and Soul* does not need to be fully developed. However, this doesn't detract from their importance to the narrative, as their character role may directly benefit or hinder the PCs. Indeed, their personalities may accent the PCs and main NPCs, as well as reveal important story elements. As such, when developing *distinct* NPCs, the GM should specifically focus on how their character traits reflect the fiction.

A dutiful apothecary with access to unique drugs and medicines.

A misanthropic journalist with a chip on his shoulder.

A compassionate beat cop who cares for the homeless.

A reclusive economics professor who hides their past.

A curious taxi driver who listens to science podcasts.

DYNAMIC PERSONAS

In contrast, *dynamic* NPCs are fully realized characters with layered personalities, realistic motivations, and well-defined traits – both positive and negative. Their complexity expands beyond their personality type, providing them with nuance and subtlety. They may also represent significant Contacts, Leaders, and Relations. In many ways, *dynamic* NPCs are comparable to actual PCs, as their interactions are multifaceted and frequently influence the conversation. Time and again, their actions influence the narrative and contribute to the story's progression; in turn, affecting the PCs' character arcs. For this reason, their *Flesh and Soul* should be more detailed and diverse. The GM may also wish to develop Moves that advance their goals and motivations.

A dutiful apothecary who spies for the Children of the Underworld. Familial ties with the Besh-Tanath provides her access to unique drugs and medicines from the Underworld. She cherishes loyalty above all else, but is slow to trust outsiders. Her golden eyes remain hidden behind red-tinted glasses.

A misanthropic journalist with a chip on his shoulder, after having watched his friend's career destroyed by local politicians. He knows there's something wrong with certain city officials, but has been hindered by the paper's editorial staff. This obsession has affected his relationships, as he's constantly trying to find a new angle.

A beat cop who cares for the homeless, in honor of his sister's memory. Lost to drugs and mental illness, she lived and died on the streets. He's begun to suspect that her claims of 'the monsters amongst us' may not have been insanity. Every Thursday, he goes to the local movie theater to relax.

A reclusive economics professor, who hides darker passions behind her standoffish demeanor. Whenever work stress gets to her, she frequents the Pokulos Club to explore the limits of pleasure and pain. She's acquired an impressive library on mysticism and anthropology.

A curious taxi driver who listens to science podcasts, due to their interest in quantum physics and space. They were training as a pilot, but an injury dashed their dreams. Now they fight depression, living vicariously through their passengers. For the right price, they offers after-hours services, driving anywhere with no questions asked.

Character Evolution

As the story progresses, the PCs may evolve in accordance to their narrative experiences, altering their perceptions and personality. Indeed, depending on their circumstances, the character may no longer be the person they were at the story's beginning. Significant NPCs may also undergo similar personality changes, be it for better or worse. This becomes increasingly important during campaigns, where they'll experience personal trials and tribulations, usually as many as the PCs themselves. This goes beyond standard Reactions, as they are not simply reacting to the story, but evolving in response to it. The GM may even wish to list potential triggers for this change, depending on the NPC.

Character evolutions typically involve the NPC's personality type or their specific Drive, Strength, Challenge, or Dark Secret. Depending on the circumstances, this change can be either dramatic or subtle, but it should be vital to their development. Also, it may be positive or negative in nature, as the NPC overcomes their personal weaknesses or succumbs to them. These changes occur during downtime and remain in effect from this point forward – until another potential evolution takes place.

The Thief: After years of betrayals, the thief trusted no one, not even her closest allies. She kept one foot out the door, ready to run at the first signs of trouble. As her relationship with the PC intensifies, she reluctantly begins placing her trust in them. When the chips are down, she comes to the PC's rescue.

The Painter: A depressive nihilist and misanthrope, the artist uses his work to reflect humanity's evils, focusing on his traumatic past. Over time, the PCs confront his abject hatred and mistrust, showing him the good in people. Slowly gaining faith and hope, he reconnects with his spirituality.

The Preacher: Zealous and xenophobic, the street preacher believes that she must protect her flock from Borderliners – those who walk between Elysium and Metropolis. Through her interactions, she becomes aware of peaceful factions amongst these creatures. After considerable struggles, she pushes aside her nagging doubts and begins aiding them.

The Dealer: Opportunistic and greedy, the dealer constantly pushes the boundaries of morality to make money. However, he learns the latest street drug warps its users into vile monstrosities. Unable to justify his actions, he tries to stop its distribution, knowing full well doing so could get him killed.

The Hotelier: Stoic and private, the hotelier fulfills their clients' perverse needs without question or comment. They are paid handsomely for their discretion. Yet, after providing an unspeakable service for one of their clients, they become wracked with guilt. Their conscience wins out; they can no longer stay silent.

However, not every NPC needs to change and evolve. Unless something significant changes, most *tertiary* NPCs should remain static. Although they may be affected by and respond to narrative events, their intrinsic natures and personalities remain unaltered. Note that this consistency does not mean they're any less compelling characters. Indeed, static characters can add narrative continuity to the conversation and fiction.

FLESH AND SOUL

Throughout the conversation, the GM portrays every character the PCs interact with. In many cases, they must develop these NPCs from scratch, yet still need to create compelling and engaging personalities. Be it character sketch or in-depth portrayal, the GM can accomplish this imposing task by considering the NPCs' **Flesh and Soul**. In short, the Flesh represents the character's *outward* appearance and qualities, while the soul reflects their *inner* nature and potential. And, as the story progresses, these two aspects provide the foundation for NPC development.

As discussed above, the level of detail required depends on the NPC's narrative significance. For *distinct* characters, this process is brief, requiring only generalized details. In contrast, *dynamic* characters require more time and specifics, delving deeper into their *Flesh and Soul*. However, in some cases, the NPC's significance won't be immediately apparent. Also, depending on the conversation and the players, the GM doesn't need to fully develop an NPC during play. They can wait to do this during downtime, especially if the NPCs inspire the players and/or may fit into a slot on the Intrigue Map.

The Flesh

The Flesh represents an NPC's external appearance, general bearing, and mannerisms, This level of characterization can include important personal qualities, such as their name, profession, and even social standing. Outwardly, the GM should consider their clothing and any notable equipment, especially accessories and weapons. These details can help players better identify who the NPC is, even without directly interacting with them. For reference, the GM can use the Flesh's general checklist, filling out as much as required to make the NPC unique (see sidebar).

THE FLESH

- Name
- General Appearance
- Apparent Age/Sex
- Bearing/Mannerisms
- Actions/Reactions
- Speech Patterns/Quirks
- Unique features/Markings
- Clothing
- Equipment/Items
- Profession

An important aspect of the Flesh is describing the NPC through their actions, which reveal these various qualities, as well as their inner nature. When communicating, they may possess notable speech patterns and inflections, as well as language use and slang. As such, the GM should consider their outstanding aspects and focus on them during the conversation. In doing so, they avoid halting the narrative flow by over-describing each NPC. This can potentially detract from the players' mental image and hinder their creative input.

ESTABLISH IDENTITY

Internal beliefs and views frequently define the character's outward *identity*, reflecting in their appearance, attitudes, and dress. When developing how the NPC appears and reacts to the world around them, the GM should consider their personal identity, such as cultural beliefs, gender, race, personal interests, and sexuality. Many of these qualities are intimately tied to the NPC's soul, yet are reflected through external signifiers. The GM should start with their specific personality type and expand upon these obvious traits.

Creator: Pottery clay freckles her cheeks and stains her tiny hands. The flannel shirt hangs over her pixie frame, three-sizes too big. Her head bobs to some unheard music, making her blue pigtails sway rhythmically.

Lover: The old man sits by the river, dressed in his Sunday's finest. The rosary plays through wizened fingers, silently counting off the beads. A woman's photo sits beside him, resting upon his neatly folded jacket.

Mediator: An infectious smile warms his round face and deep, brown eyes. The crooked tie is something a child would buy, yet he wears it with obvious pride. When he greets you, he speaks as if you're old friends, swallowing your hand in his.

Ruler: She enters the room like a storm, filling the space with her presence. Her grey blazer is crisp, perfectly tailored for her imposing height. She ignores you as she heads to the table with long, quick strides.

Unshackled: Her face remains hidden beneath matted, auburn hair. None of the secondhand clothes match, yet have chaotic symbols woven into them. Every arcane movement fills the air with hints of cherry blossoms and jasmine incense.

MAKING THEM MEMORABLE

Any NPC introduced into the conversation should be portrayed as memorable and realistic individuals. Otherwise, they risk fading into the background or weakening the overall narrative. Believable characters help strengthen the fiction, lending depth and importance to the setting. In turn, these interactions further invest the players creating emotional resonance. They'll remember these character moments and seek them out again.

As such, when initially describing the NPC, the GM should focus on one or two distinctive characteristics, be it their appearance or mannerisms. Following that initial encounter, the GM can continue fleshing out the NPC as required, adding new and compelling qualities – as well as complementing the player's vision of them.

However, NPCs are best presented through interactions, not specific descriptors. As with the literary adage, *Show, Don't Tell*, the GM shouldn't characterize them solely as 'old,' 'scarred,' or 'talks with an accent.' Instead, they should use distinctive actions and examples to reveal these qualities and the NPC's nature. The GM can also hint at the NPC's secret and supernatural characteristics, alluding to hidden dangers. Create interesting imagery, thus sparking the players' interest and imagination.

- Smoke snakes around the ghostly pale man, as if he's stepped out some noir film.
- His blockish face is a nest of scars, obscuring eyes burning with violence.
- A miasma of cheap perfume and cheap booze hovers around her, yet it can't completely mask the bitter rot beneath.
- The youthful woman remains focused on her cellphone's display. When she finally notices you, her painted lips curl back to reveal too-white teeth.
- Bony fingers twist and curl like spiders, crawling over the fabric of his threadbare suit.
- She clutches her textbook to her chest like a shield, averting her gaze to anything other than you. When the timid smile comes, it's filled with desperate hope.

In addition to describing the NPC, the GM can try *becoming* the NPC. This can be accomplished by portraying the NPC's vocal inflections and physical mannerisms, such as facial expressions and hand gestures. This helps reveal qualities that cannot be effectively conveyed with words, as well as grounds the players in the personal interaction. However, the GM should be careful not to translate the NPC into a caricature, as such portrayals can ring false – even comical or offensive – and disrupt the conversation.

ENCOURAGE PLAYER PARTICIPATION

The conversation's collaborative nature means the GM isn't solely responsible for developing every NPC within the narrative. Players can – and should – participate in the creative process, especially if the NPC is connected to their PC, such as a Contact or Relation. They may also do this for tertiary NPCs, who are part of the PCs' daily lives. This encourages players to contribute to their PCs' surroundings, lending them agency and investing them in the fiction. The GM can encourage the players by continually asking questions throughout the session and utilizing their answers to flesh out the various NPCs. Many of these answers can be later used to further develop the NPC's *Flesh and Soul* during downtime. As the story progresses, the GM and players can weave these NPC into the Intrigue Map and create unique story arcs.

- Who is the PC’’s closest colleague at work?
- What is it people tend to remember about the PC?
- Who does the PC want to impress and why?
- What is it that the PC doesn't like about said person?
- Who is the PC's favorite food server and why?
- Who does the PC see every day, yet doesn't know the name of?
- What secret did the PC share with them?
- What did they do to make the PC remember them?
- Who is the PC's worst neighbor and why?
- What are their distinguishing features?
- Who helped the PC recently and what did they do?
- How closer are the PC to his family?
- What peer does the PC interact with outside the professional setting?
- Who hurt the PC and what was it that finally ended the friendship?
- What does he do to relax and relieve stress?

MAINTAINING THE FICTION

Despite *KULT: Divinity Lost's* established setting, each game world reflects the individual game group and their narrative vision. As such, the GM should also consider the fiction when developing NPCs, and characterizing them to represent its nature. In doing so, this further establishes the world and overall setting, as people are products of their environment and, in turn, their environment is a reflection of them. Particular personality types are better suited for specific stories, as they accent and personify the stories mood and tone. Indeed, NPCs can represent metaphors and themes, thus further strengthening the fiction of the conversation.

Below are some examples of NPCs suited to the different *Reflections* (p. 232). They represent the underlying Agendas and Principles that make up each Reflection's mood and tone.

Darkness and Decay: Shadows cling to Tegan like a second skin, muting her pale features. Her smile never reaches those doll-like eyes, as if lost somewhere in-between. She speaks in sensual enigmas that attract and repel you simultaneously.

Gods and Monsters: Cinnamon hides her inhuman ears beneath locks of strawberry blonde. She rarely smiles, as sharpened teeth reveal her bestial nature. Her clothes are bohemian chic, all scarves and prismatic color. In exchange for blood and inks, she'll safely lead you through the city's hidden places.

Illusions and Sorrows: Short and stout, Woo-ryong spent most of his childhood running errands for restaurants. Now, he runs his own ramen shop, renowned for its seclusion as much as its amazing food. As such, he's become a font of information about the city. He lords over this like gold, only divvying out snippets to trusted friends.

Blood and Guts: Voyteche served in every backwater proxy war to ravage the globe, eroding his soul with every fresh horror. More scars than skin, he's quick to anger and slow to forgive an insult. Silence is his enemy, making him twitch and squirm in his seat. Any moment, you expect his suit to surrender to the strain of his muscled bulk.

We Unlucky Few: Jessie Jazz used to entertain at the Cock & Robin, but the Turning changed all that. Only the blunt pistol at her hip sings for her now. She drinks too much and laughs too little. She tugs on her autumn hair whenever nervous, especially when the night draws close.

Afternoon Horrors: Scruffy-haired and moonfaced, Bully Boy looks like he's only just pulled himself out of bed. His hand-me-down leather jacket drapes over him; its elbows are crudely fixed with duct tape. He constantly pulls his over-washed Dead Kennedys t-shirt over his belly.

USING REFERENCE MATERIAL

One of the GM's greatest resources for developing NPCs are photos and/or illustrations. These immediately provide inspiration, as well as establishing the NPC's outward appearance. Depending on their source, they may also lend additional context to the character.During downtime, the GM (and players) can collect various images and add them to a communal collection. Whenever they need fresh faces, they can then pick one from this growing rogue's gallery. The GM may also add these images to their Intrigue Map, making it easier to track their connections.

Tarot cards can also serve this purpose, not only providing inspiration for appearance, but meaning and themes as well. The ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** tarot deck contains brief rules for generating NPCs in this fashion (see ***Appendix***).

The Soul

Compelling characters can have interesting outward appearances, but it's what lies beneath the surface that truly matters. When developing an NPC, the GM must consider both their visible qualities – the *Flesh* – and their hidden qualities – the *Soul*. Although the NPC's true nature may remain unseen throughout the narrative, the *Soul* defines and guides their actions and reactions. At their core, most NPCs fall under specific personality types, which are detailed below. Yet, even these Archetypes can have nuance and subtlety.

However, as previously mentioned, the GM should also consider whether the NPC is a *distinct* or *dynamic* character when initially developing their *Soul*. *Distinct* characters require straightforward characterizations, usually reflecting their personality type's core principles. In contrast, *dynamic* characters require complex characterizations with numerous aspects and layers to their *Soul*. The GM may even wish to include additional traits specific to their campaign's fiction.

ASPECTS OF THE SOUL

Most NPCs can be generally defined by their *Drives* and *Personality* – both of which should be developed in unison, as they are fundamentally intertwined. These, in turn, are influenced by and reveal quintessential aspects of the *Soul*, such as their *Aversions*, *Needs*, and *Wants*. Although every NPC is unique, these standard descriptors can help the GM define and develop each individual. They also serve as inspiration for effectively roleplaying the NPC throughout the conversation by outlining important character motivations.

Role represents the NPC's narrative purpose within the story, such as Relation, Contact or Leader. This helps the GM establish their importance on the Intrigue Map, if necessary.

Personality represents the NPC's fundamental nature and how they interact with and perceive their world. An NPC's personality may become self-evident upon encountering them, and can be reflected through their actions and the *Flesh*. However, NPCs may obfuscate their true personalities, as well as suppress their inner natures. The most common personality types are outlined below.

Drive represents the NPC's connection to the Illusion, specifically the dominant Principle affecting them. The Principle's influence may be subtle or commanding, but always motivates them. Drives often define and shape their challenge and Dark Secret. However, the GM can temper the Principle, depending on the NPC's individuality and personality type. For example, not every Caregiver (Safety) is benevolent, and not every Ruler (Power) needs to be cruel.

Strengths are positive qualities and abilities that make the NPC stand out. They can be any attributes that define them as unique, such as a soothing voice, striking appearance, or impressive physique. These can include important skills like expert hacker, mechanical prowess, mythic knowledge, etc.

Feel free to use Advantages from ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** (p. 90) as inspiration. The GM can also utilize these Strengths to generate Moves, reflecting interactions between PC and NPC.

Challenges are flaws or shortcomings that the NPC suffers and must overcome. These can include physical, mental, or emotional issues, such as chronic pain, an addiction, paranoia, and troublesome history. Most NPCs try to hide their challenges, but sometimes they've immediately evident. Many times the challenge is also tied to their Dark Secret. Feel free to use Disadvantages from ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** (p. 89) as inspiration. These can also play heavily into the character's evolution.

Dark secrets are personal events that haunt the NPC deeply, even if they are unaware of its true origins. This often causes them confusion, doubt, and shame. They may lie about it to others, and even to themselves, desperately hiding or denying their existence. What lies deep inside them, causing the NPC spiritual pain? Is it feelings of abandonment? Past mistakes that can't be set right? An injustice they long to resolve? These can also include embarrassing quirks, past traumas, criminal history, or potentially damning secrets.

Needs are what the NPC cannot live without and continually seeks to possess, which rarely, if ever, changes.

Wants are what the NPC finds favorable or desires at the moment. These frequently change throughout the narrative.

Aversions are what the character avoids, dislikes, opposes, and even actively seeks to destroy. Depending on their challenges, they may have multiple aversions from phobias or bad memories.

PERSPECTIVE

Our personalities and personal interactions are inherently shaped by our individual perspective. In turn, these perspectives are filtered through the lens of personal beliefs and relationships, as well as cultural and societal upbringings. As such, the GM should take the various factors into consideration while portraying each NPC, as their perspectives may reframe the entire interaction. Effectively, what the NPC experiences may not match how they perceive and interpret the interaction. They may make wrong conclusions, both negative and positive.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, this becomes even more important, as the Illusion itself may subtly alter or obscure the character's perspective. Characters heavily influenced by the Principles may be completely blinded to the truth, and, thus, react in unexpected ways. Indeed, strongly influenced NPCs may suffer from cognitive dissonance, effectively refusing to believe what's in front of their eyes. Eventually, these inherent beliefs and ideas may be overcome, but require extensive roleplaying and character evolution.

The NPC's checkered past has led them to having several encounters with the authorities. This past has reinforced their delinquent nature and mistrust. When dealing with *The Detective*, they have established preconceptions that cloud the interactions. They're suspicious and agitated, frightened that they'll be incarcerated again and constantly on the defensive.

A Caregiver, the NPC wants to help everyone. No matter how corrupt or misleading those around them are, they always make excuses for this behavior. They wish to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, even when all evidence points to the contrary. As such, they've become the victim of repeated abusive relationships.

PERSONALITY TYPES

Most NPCs fall under one of the following **personality types.** Unlike character ***Archetypes***, these represent the NPC's inner nature, thought process, and overall viewpoint on life. While these personality traits may guide the character toward certain life paths, they do not need to define the NPC's professions and role in society. Instead, the GM can use these **personality types** as general guidelines when developing their NPCs. Each description provides the aspects typically associated with them, but they're in no way restrictive. Indeed, dynamic characters may play against their actual personality type or reveal its subtle nuances.

There are 21 **personality types** described below. One way to give a quickly introduced NPC some color is to simply randomize the personality type and act according to its Wants, Needs and Aversions.

Is the man tending the bar a Dreamer, Lover or Magistrate. Is the police officer a thrill-seeker, rebel or misanthrope?

- [1] Believer
- [2] Caregiver
- [3] Creator
- [4] Dreamer
- [5] Explorer
- [6] Follower
- [7] Fool
- [8] Lover
- [9] Innocent
- [10] Magistrate
- [11] Manipulator
- [12] Mediator
- [13] Misanthrope
- [14] Rebel
- [15] Ruler
- [16] Sage
- [17] Shadow
- [18] Socialite
- [19] Thrill-Seeker
- [20] Traditionalist
- [21] Unshackled

Believer

Devout and faithful, Believers are driven by their personal convictions in something. This can be cultural, ideological, religious, or sociological. Their philosophy is thoroughly ingrained, dominating much of their personal life. It provides them meaning and solace, as well as defines their morality. Believers can be the old lady who donates everything to the church, the hardened heavy metal fan who worships the band's message, or the middle-aged woman who found her true meaning after joining the secret cult. They may develop their own rituals and rites, adhering to these tenets throughout their daily lives. Indeed, much of the Believer's identity is defined by their inner faith, lending them true conviction, as well as blind stubbornness.

Drive: Law/Submission

Strength: Unwavering devotion, spiritual resilience, inner strength, selflessness, recognizes the beyond, inspire others, knowledgeable

Challenge: Maintain their belief system within society, lack of humility, acknowledge negative aspects of their belief, prejudice against nonbelievers, close-minded

Dark Secret: Had crippling moment of doubt, shunned family/friends who were nonbelievers, discovered truth about faith and its darker purpose, failed to adhere to their tenets

Needs: To devote themselves to some concept, person, philosophy, etc.

Wants: To share their beliefs, to have purpose in life, to be validated, to be part of a community, to acquire artifacts/proof associated with their belief, to participate in rituals associated with their belief

Aversion: When reality conflicts with their belief, self-doubts and unwanted questions, when their belief is challenged, denied, or ridiculed.

Caregiver

Empathic and nurturing, Caregivers innately desire to help others, placing the needs of others – even strangers – above their own. These aspirations are usually altruistic and genuine, but can be out of guilt or self-doubt. Fiercely protective and unabashedly loving, Caregivers sacrifice everything to shelter those under their care and protection. In turn, this provides them with an unwavering purpose and inner strength. However, some may be prone to martyrdom, hiding their own suffering rather than burdening others – or even displaying how much they're suffering to show how much they care. On some occasions, Caregivers become smothering and overprotective, even violent in the course of their duty.

Drive: Community/Safety

Strength: Compassion, inner strength, nurturing skills, patience, empathy, Good Samaritan

Challenge: Ignoring their own best interests, becoming codependent, overstepping their boundaries, becoming overly emotional, wracked with guilt

Dark Secret: Failed someone they loved, remained in abusive relationship, obsessed with saving someone

Needs: To provide comfort and security to others

Wants: To make people happy and healthy, to receive recognition for their efforts – especially when they make a genuine difference

Aversion: When their ward is upset or harmed. If they're prevented from being near their ward. When they're no longer needed. To be asked to go away. When they're used without any acknowledgement

Creator

Visionaries and builders, Creators do everything within their ability to fulfill and complete their aspirations and craft their dreams into physical reality. Be they an artist, entrepreneur, or scientist, Creators utilize their imagination and personal drive to reinvent reality and establish their mark upon it. They drive others to help them achieve their goals. While this creativity can be extremely beneficial, their passions can consume them, driving them beyond the limits of morality and wisdom. Even as they build their dreams, the Creator may tear down their personal worlds or abandon reality and its responsibilities. Failure is not an option.

Drive: Awakening/Compulsion

Strength: Ingenuity, unwavering drive, creativity, artistic talent, engineering/mechanical proficiency, observant, quick thinker

Challenge: Self-doubt, non-conformity, perfectionist, fear of failure, fear of criticism, arrogance, easily distracted

Dark Secret: Substance addiction, suffered major depression, stole someone else's work, actually lacks any talent

Needs: To produce something unique to the world

Wants: Accolades for their achievements, to explore new ideas for inspiration, to share experiences with other creators

Aversion: Failure and imperfection, mediocrity, criticism, those without vision, the ordinary and mundane

Dreamer

Dreamers have big ideas, passionate projects, and ambitious plans for the future. They're inspiring and creative, able to motivate others with their radical ideas. However, they are the Creator's reflection, seldom possessing the ability to actually fulfill their goals. Indeed, they're often chasing one dream after another, having hundreds of half-finished projects. They can be the inventor with grand ideas, the writer with countless drafts half-finished, or the career woman following jobs from country to country. Unfortunately, Dreamers can become extremely self-absorbed and self destructive, ignoring reality for their passions. People may consider them unreliable and scorn them for their unfulfilled efforts.

Drive: Allure/Compulsion

Strength: Energetic, inventive, open minded, expert in varied proficiencies, collector, awe-inspiring

Challenge: Lack of focus, self-absorbed, obsessive, self-destructive, absentminded, drug addiction, bad reputation

Dark Secret: Had idea stolen, abandoned passion project, engaged in destructive relationship, lost self and livelihood chasing impossible dreams

Needs: The freedom to dream and indulge their passions

Wants: People who indulge/share their fantasies, talking about their dreams, discovering new passions, creating new dreams

Aversion: Having to face personal limitations and unwanted realities, when their dreams are questioned, encountering difficulties while work toward set goals, dealing with banal and mundane life

Explorer

Inquisitive and social, the Explorer thirsts for new experiences and knowledge. This compulsion to learn drives them, and they'll spend countless hours reading, researching, and traveling. This desire to expand their minds and spirits can stem from many sources, ranging from the genuine need to understand their world or to simply be the smartest person in the room. They can be the hardened journalist, the worldwide traveler, or even the relentless conspiracy theorist. However, explorers are rarely satisfied, suffering from abstract thoughts and restless spirits. Boundaries mean little to them, both geographical and emotional, as they continually tug on threads just to see where they lead.

Drive: Awakening/Compulsion

Strength: Broad knowledge base, fearless, good instincts, physically fit, improviser, prepared, worldly, skilled linguist, ambitious

Challenge: Hardened loner, relentless nature, compulsive spirit, jealousy, wanderlust, obsessive, loneliness

Dark Secret: Went somewhere they shouldn't have, abandoned previous life, indulged in questionable activities, lost something important, trapped by responsibilities

Needs: To learn and explore new concepts, cultures, ideas, and/or locations

Wants: To unlock mysteries and puzzles, to be first to discover new things, to experience new sensations, to forge their own path, freedom

Aversion: To encounter limitations and boundaries, to be denied knowledge and learning, to have connections and/or restrictions, dealing with routines

Follower

Be they dutiful apprentice or loyal minion, the Follower submits themselves to another stronger, smarter, and/or wiser person or organization. They suppress their inner desires, offering themselves over to the causes, directives, and ideals of their superiors. They allow themselves to be instructed how to live and think. Unlike Believers, Followers surrender themselves simply to be part of something larger than themselves, usually out of fear, self-doubt, or the need for community and acceptance. They may not even truly grasp the precepts they're taught to uphold. Followers can be NPCs like the unquestioning soldier, the dutiful trophy wife, the ruthless cultist, or the conservative uncle.

Drive: Community/Hierarchy

Strength: Has mentor, unwavering belief, loyal to superiors, code of honor, can call on community, self-sacrifice, devoted to the cause

Challenge: Self-doubt, fear of superior, no 'true' personality, afraid of being excluded, indecisive without superior's instruction

Dark Secret: Abandoned morality for superior, submitted themselves to humiliation/trauma, lacks any sense of self, shunned loved ones

Needs: To have someone/something to follow

Wants: Someone to provide clear directions, to receive superior's praise, have their life controlled by someone, to be part of the community

Aversion: Being questioned about their devotion, having anything negative said about their leader/group, having to make personal decisions, being alone

Fool

Tricksters and comedians, Fools desire to push the societal limits, as much as they crave attention. Forever testing boundaries, they ridicule established cultural beliefs, concepts, and customs. No one and nothing are immune to the Fool's satire, and they can be viciously cruel, even to those closest to them. Some are desperate to be the center of attention, while others use their humor to obfuscate their traumatized souls. Fools can be the class clown, the political satirist, or even the self-deprecating loner. Their wit and spontaneous natures can be off-putting, only driving them to test boundaries further, until their humor becomes detrimental to their best interests.

Drive: Discord/Abuse

Strength: Self-confidence, cleverness, intuition, self-reliant, charismatic aura, crafty, fast talker, keen-eyed, witty

Challenge: Cruel natured, off-putting, devious nature, lack of empathy, doesn't know when to stop, never taken seriously

Dark Secret: Prank went horribly wrong, insulted dangerous/vengeful person, hurt loved one's feelings needlessly, lost status due to foolishness

Needs: To test boundaries and gain attention

Wants: To make others laugh, to hide their pain with humor, expose unspoken truths, ridicule those in power, expose hypocrisy

Aversion: To be ignored, to be dismissed or considered boring, to be seen for who they truly are, hypocrisy and untruths, see injustice go unpunished

Lover

Passionate and romantic, the Lover yearns to share an intimate relationship with another person (or persons). However, unlike the nurturing Caretaker, the Lover's affections are not one-sided, as they wish for their feelings to be reciprocated. They long for idealized partnerships, unrestrained passions, and shared pleasures. However, for many Lovers, the chase itself is what provides them joy and satisfaction, confusing their intense desires for complex love. Their affections may blind them to betrayals and pain, and they may be desperate to 'fix' their partner. They may grow bored once the heady passion ebbs. Lust may twist them, igniting possessiveness and jealousy.

Drive: Allure/Lust

Strength: Passionate, romantic, idealistic, charismatic, artistic and musical talents, hypnotic, seductive

Challenge: Blinded by desire, obsessiveness, jealousy, quixotic, sexual neurosis, victim of passion, adoration cools off quickly

Dark Secret: Suffered sexual trauma, stalked someone, harmed someone in jealous rage, indulged in humiliating acts to win affection

Needs: Desires intimacy and adoration

Wants: Sexual pleasure, romantic pursuits, the thrill of the chase, acceptance and adoration

Aversion: Rejection, solitude, ugliness and unpleasantness in their lives, complexity in relationships.

Innocent

Naive and kindhearted, the Innocent views the world with an unreserved optimism and trust. Much like Traditionalists, they wish to share their wholesome existence with others. Their belief in world solidarity and humanity's inherent goodness is unwavering, doing what is 'right' without doubt or hesitation. As such, many live guilt-free lives, completely ignorant of worldly dangers and personal traumas around them – such things simply cannot and should not be possible. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, most Innocents remain perpetual Sleepers, forever blinded by the Illusion. This also makes them tempting targets for cults, creatures, and other threats, all eager to corrupt and utilize them.

Drive: Safety/Submission

Strength: Empathic, calming aura, animal kinship, emotionally/mentally resilient, magnetic personality, devoted bodyguards and protectors, infectious optimism

Challenge: Overly naive, overly trusting, feels others pain intensely, doesn't understand social cues, harassed for beliefs, stalked by someone

Dark Secret: Been betrayed by someone, watched cruelty inflicted upon someone, couldn't help people in pain, doomed to be used in ritual

Needs: To inspire compassion and goodness in others

Wants: To believe in humanity's innate goodness, people to care for each other, people to be truthful, to be protected, to do what is 'right' no matter the cost.

Aversion: Negativity, anger and violence, lack of trust, deceit and corruption, cruelty and lack of empathy by and against others.

Magistrate

Judges and scholars, the Magistrate views society's virtues and iniquities through an impartial lens, seeking to discover truth and – hopefully – justice. They typically possess equable and perceptive personalities, and are clear-thinkers with well-defined moral codes. Magistrates are also fonts of knowledge, which allows them to assess everything evidentially. They can be the civil servant, the gang leader with a strict honor code, or the attorney addressing humanitarian issues. However, Magistrates can become blinded by arrogance, consumed by their sense of purpose, or believe their worldview to be the only Truth. Their hubris may also twist their view of justice, enraging them when challenged.

Drive: Law/Power

Strength: Strong moral and ethical code, font of knowledge, law expertise, perceptive, unwavering, code of honor, analytical mind, vigilant

Challenge: Hubris, blinded by personal beliefs, inflexible personality, win at any cost, obsessive nature, over analyzing things

Dark Secret: Condemned an innocent, allowed the guilty to get away, couldn't help others, had the system fail them, failed the Greater Good

Needs: To find truth and obtain justice

Wants: Uphold order, prove the system works, find answers and solutions, research history/culture/legal doctrines, make the guilty pay, protect the innocent

Aversion: When something obstructs justice, when the code is broken/misused, when truth remains hidden, when injustice is inflicted on other

Manipulator

Control-freaks and schemers, Manipulators seek to coerce and intimidate others into serving their desires. They maintain power over people through pleasantries and threats, sweet promises and heartless deceit. Their mind games are as cruel as they are clever, swaying intimates and strangers to do their bidding. They can be the deceitful priest, the lustful psychologist, the abusive partner, or the false friend. They lack remorse, serving their own needs and desires above all others. As such, Manipulators rarely comprehend true emotions or relationships, as they view everything purely through power dynamics and the need to maintain control.

Drive: Avarice/Power

Strength: Silver tongued, perceptive, charismatic aura, authoritative manner, eye for detail, opportunist

Challenge: Telling the truth, hiding real personality, understanding another's needs, self-righteous, unreliable and inconsistent

Dark Secret: Humiliated after being caught lying, lost control over loved one, drove someone into desperate act, manipulated vengeful person

Needs: To manipulate others into serving their desires.

Wants: Maintaining control over someone, being served by another person, tormenting others and making them weak, being in position of power, blame others for their failures

Aversion: To be confronted, being made vulnerable, when someone escapes their control, when they're exposed for who they truly are, when they'd denied their needs or wants.

Mediator

Diplomats and peacemakers, Mediators are open-minded idealists who continually seek common ground between divergent viewpoints. They wish to bring people together, dispel their differences, and work towards the Greater Good. As such, they frequently seek out allies and win over their enemies, establishing extensive networks of contacts and business relationships. Mediators are also intuitive, flexible, and dedicated to their cause, usually promoting harmony. They may be the dogged union leader, the helpful police officer, or the priest working with local street gangs. However, their idealism and altruistic natures may work against them, leading to impractical solutions. Their empathic nature makes them take everything to heart, particularly their failures.

Drive: Community/Honor

Strength: Empathic, visionary, open-minded, diplomatic, resilient to adversity, culturally aware, harmonious, patient

Challenge: Overly altruistic, asceticism and self-defeating behaviors, moralistic, obsessive, emotionally distant, won't stop working

Dark Secret: Failure caused groups to fight, abandoned family for work, forsook own needs to point of harming self, favored one side over the other

Needs: To establish harmony and resolve conflicts

Wants: To make people accept compromises, create mutually benefit deals, organize situations, make opposing viewpoints understood, make/maintain alliances and contacts

Aversion: Close-mindedness, ignorance, people refusing to compromise/negotiate, surrendering personal convictions, disorganization

Misanthrope

Cynics and skeptics, the Misanthrope harbors an antipathy, distrust, and overall resentment of humanity. They also despise people for their general acceptance of reality and societal norms. Despite their feelings of rejection, Misanthropes cut themselves off from the world anyway, as they feel distrustful and socially isolated. Perhaps they've been repeatedly betrayed or emotionally traumatized, filling them with contempt and rage. In other cases, they're disgusted by the world's hypocrisy and cruel nature, deadening any faith or hope for better things. Misanthropes can be the jaded homicide detective that has seen too much, the social worker who's tried and failed too many times, or the death metal singer who spills their vitriol out through music. Even so, some Misanthropes can be loving, devoted friends and family members – to those they trust.

Drive: Exclusion/Torment

Strength: Keen-eyed, stubborn, self-reliant, socially aware, unrelenting, well-spoken, rebellious, keen instincts, well-read, hardened

Challenge: Disillusioned, antisocial, paranoid, mean-spirited, disheartened, repressed memories, cynical, doesn't trust even good intentions

Dark Secret: Failed to stop tragedy, watched loved one die needlessly, suffered personal trauma (mental/physical), prevented from helping others due to social conventions

Needs: To reveal the world's ugliness

Wants: To be heard and proven right, for people to see the world as they do, do what is right rather than easy, for real change to be made, to be left alone, to make an honest connection with someone

Aversion: When their ethical beliefs are challenged, when their warnings go ignored, when their doubts are proven founded, dealing with the ignorant masses, humanity and the world it created

Rebel

Nonconformists and insurgents, Rebels questions and challenge the established cultural norms and social hierarchies. They seek to share their vision with the masses, trying to change their viewpoints and reveal the world's injustices. Unlike Misanthropes, however, Rebels actively engage with people and form groups of like-minded individuals to tear down cultural, political, and religious beliefs and traditions. While most activists do so through debate and protest, more radically natured Rebels can become extremely violent in their approach and philosophies. The Rebel can be the LGBTQ-rights activist, the hackers trying to expose corporate and government greed, or the white supremacist fighting for racial purity. Many times, whether they are called a patriot or terrorist solely depends on what side of society the Rebel finds themselves.

Drive: Awakening/Conflict

Strength: Independent, socially aware, charismatic, problem solver, risk-taker, code of honor, inner resolve, skilled combatant, public speaker

Challenge: Unconventional, violent, overly driven, clannish, in trouble with law,

Dark Secret: Killed innocents while fighting the system, suffered at the hands of societal hierarchy, has been ostracized by family/friends for beliefs, denied standard human rights

Needs: Overthrow the established order

Wants: Their voices being heard, tear down social norms, have others join their cause, fight the good fight, be recognized for their efforts, rescue those trapped by the system

Aversion: Submitting to social norms, denying personal beliefs, failing to change peoples' minds, being dismissed for beliefs, witnessing injustice

Ruler

Directors and tyrants, the Ruler yearns for power and dominance over their world, including all others. They work relentlessly to further their role in society, establishing themselves and their lofty goals. They try to inspire others to become better people, paving the way toward a better future. However, while many Rulers are fair and just leaders, others can become ruthless and vengeful against those who do not obey orders or follow their righteous path. Competitive and fearful, these despots ruthlessly attack, humiliate, and punish any who challenge their position. The Ruler can be the inspiring team captain, the controlling patriarch, the tireless corporate paragon, or the ruthless movie producer. Rulers are humanity's trendsetters and figureheads, shaping reality to their whim.

Drive: Power/Victory

Strength: Natural leader, charismatic, decisive, astute, patient and attentive, diplomatic, broad skill set, reliable, persistent

Challenge: Authoritative, arrogant, controlling, vengeful, refuses to delegate, refuses to share power, envious, power-hungry

Dark Secret: Humiliated by personal failure, drove an underling to suicide, betrayed by trusted servant, crushed mentor to get ahead, defeated by stronger person

Needs: To obtain and maintain control over others

Wants: To uphold the sense of justice, to maintain stability, be praised and treated with respect, to be rewarded for accomplishments, demonstrate their superiority, establish dominance, lead others

Aversion: Disloyalty, personal failure, losing fame/power/wealth, showing weakness, chaos, being ignored

Sage

Gurus and scholars, the Sage devotes themselves to the amassing of knowledge and inner wisdom. While some serve as mentors, Sages typically live solitary existences, preferring the esoteric and otherworldly to the mundane interactions of normal life. They're forever seeking enlightenment and continually question and seek the truth – or some aspect thereof. However, they do not actively share this information and insight with others; their quest for awareness is solitary. This disconnection can make them appear aloof and arrogant as they consider themselves unfettered by the mundane. The Sage can be the curious professor, the shy bibliophile, or the devoted philosopher. Only the rare few learn how to balance their ceaseless learning with living in society.

Drive: Awakening/Community

Strength: Deeply intelligent, intensely curious, keen-eyed, relentless researcher, quick learner, font of knowledge, makes connections

Challenge: Impractical, prideful, detached, esoteric nature, solitary, lack of common sense, utilizing knowledge in mundane world

Dark Secret: Discovered unwanted truth, witnessed events that challenged self-perception, drove off family and friends, devoted too much time to their search, became obsessed with learning something

Needs: To amass personal knowledge and wisdom

Wants: Books, research materials, change perceptions in others

Aversion: Ignorance, stupidity, close-mindedness, secrets, misinformation, personal doubts, mundane responsibilities

Shadow

Similar to the Misanthrope, the Shadow has become embittered and resentful. However, they've turned this antipathy inwards, embracing self-loathing and self-destructive behaviors. These feelings of disgust and hostility may stem from personal guilt, shame, or low self-esteem, twisting their beliefs with anxieties and doubts. Shadows wallow in the negative aspects of their personalities, lending power to their worst impulses and thoughts. They may push back against these destructive thoughts momentarily, but eventually fall back into their defeatist patterns at the slightest personal trouble. Many dull their troubled minds with alcohol, drugs, and other vices, or allow others to torment them – as they feel they deserve nothing more than contempt. They may even feed off their pain, instilling guilt in others through their martyrdom. The Shadow can be the perpetually abused spouse, the sole survivor of some tragedy, or the religious conservative ashamed of their homosexual desires. Outwardly, the Shadow's self-loathing may not be logical, but to them it is completely justified.

Drive: Exclusion/Fear

Strength: Garner sympathy, manipulative, social chameleon, endure pain (emotional, mental, and/or physical), jaded, read a crowd, shift blame

Challenge: Codependent, substance abuse, self harms, depression, apathetic, hateful, martyrdom, obsessive

Dark Secret: Suffers substance addiction, survived when family did not, drove someone to suicide through guilt, commits acts of self-harming, purposefully destroyed own livelihood

Needs: To harm and punish self, regardless of consequences

Wants: Indulge in self-denial, reveal self-loathing and weakness, feed off other people's concerns, oblivion, punishment, to feel anything (usually through self-inflicted pain)

Aversion: Reminders of personal faults, to be exposed for who they truly are, to have their ignored, forced to deal with reality, being told they're beautiful/worthy/etc.

Socialite

Divas and elitists, the Socialite craves being the center of attention and reminding the world of their superiority. Trendsetters, they're charismatic and stylish, continually inspiring and/or intimidating those they deem 'worthy' into serving their voracious needs and desires. They live in the now, never the past, paving the way to the future that best suits them. Socialites know they're the best dressed and educated, leading others through their masterful etiquette, sensual grace, and striking charisma. However, because they believe they're exceptional, they also expect the best from anyone around them. People who fail their expectations invite their wrath, and any who challenge their dominance are considered enemies. Socialites can be the wealthy club owner, the rich trophy wife, the famous actor, or the trust-fund teenager. Only the best of the best is enough to satisfy their refined tastes.

Drive: Allure/Hierarchy

Strength: Charismatic, elite education, wealthy, refined etiquette, musically talented, network of contacts, collector, erotic appearance, opportunist, natural leader

Challenge: Object of obsession, elitist, arrogant, bad reputation, unrestrained desires, drug addict, competitive, compulsive

Dark Secret: Engaged in illicit activities, being blackmailed, destroyed rival's life, covered up crime to protect reputation, substance abuse

Needs: To be center of attention

Wants: To be admired and feel wanted, to be invited to social gatherings, to be part of 'in crowd,' to expand wealth and influence, to be trendsetter

Aversion: Following in others' footsteps, humiliation and scandal, being ignored, having limelight stolen, dealing with 'lessers,' having someone fail them, being told they can't do something

Thrill-Seeker

Adrenaline junkies and wildcards, the Thrill-Seeker risks everything to ride the edge and experience danger. Whereas the Explorer seeks enlightenment, the Thrill-Seeker desires only immediate emotional and physical gratification. They're continually restless, craving the next most intense experiences and sensations. If they cannot find these situations, the Thrill-Seeker tends to create them – no matter the cost to themselves or those around them. Change remains their continual purpose, which may interfere with their long-term goals and establish any form of stability. This can make them erratic and undependable, as they push aside relationships and responsibilities for the next adrenaline rush. The Thrill-Seeker may be trying to fill some emotional or mental void inside, or seeking to escape from themselves and their past. They can be the conflict journalist placing themselves in harm's way, the race car driver pushing the limits of safety, or even the sex-addict exploring darker passions and pleasures. They'll do anything to feel alive, if only for an instant.

Drive: Conflict/Lust

Strength: Athletic, relentless competitor, fearless, charismatic aura, ignores pain, spontaneous, never backs down, stubborn, wanderer

Challenge: Pigheaded, flighty, greedy, obsessive, thrill junkie, selfish, never satisfied, loner, dismissive, aggressive, sexually neurotic

Dark Secret: Pushed someone beyond their limits, hurt/killed someone while taking risk, abandoned relationship, addicted to pain killers, engaged in dangerous sex

Needs: Gratify their longings for excitement and danger

Wants: Get rush of adrenaline at any cost, feel alive and free, experience something new, test their personal limits, look death in face, be first at something

Aversion: Whenever things are safe and boring, being denied their thrill, everyday/mundane life, boring people, fear, told something isn't possible

Traditionalist

Conservatives and nationalists, the Traditionalist strives to maintain established cultural, political, and religious ideals. They completely oppose modernity, rejecting new ideas or anything that challenges their beliefs and values. For some, this desire can be as simple as practicing established behaviors and personal rituals. Other Traditionalists embrace and practice exceptionalism, striving to impose their will upon the world and suppress the 'other.' They become increasingly volatile as the status quo is threatened and their traditions are broken. Indeed, many Traditionalists view change as abandoning their identity, betraying who they are and how things should be. They can be the classical conservative fighting to maintain moral order, the bigoted relative spewing toxic slights and slurs, the Dominionist Christian family, or the pretentious academic who believes in classical education methods.

Drive: Honor/Law

Strength: Optimistic, loyal, strong convictions, patriotic, driven by faith, code of honor, motivated

Challenge: Stubborn, close-minded, arrogant, prejudiced, ritualistic, lacks worldly knowledge, stuck in past

Dark Secret: Disowned family for 'disloyalty,' engaged in fanatical behaviors, lied to harm someone outside their belief system, embraced xenophobia

Needs: To maintain established traditions

Wants: Traditions and values to be upheld, preach their beliefs to others, surround themselves with like-minded people, undermine any threat to normalcy

Aversion: When the traditions and values are challenged, when forced to adapt, the 'other,' modernity and the future, being left behind by the world

Unshackled

Sadists and degenerates, the Unshackled follow their base instincts and passions to gain personal gratification. However, unlike Thrill-Seekers, they are completely unrestrained by societal constraints, such as decency, morality, or regret. They mercilessly and shamelessly indulge their cruel passions, inflicting pain and suffering to fulfill their dreams and desires. The Unshackled are seekers in dark places and wielders of painful truths (or what they see as truths) crazed psychotics and cunning sociopaths, some bestial and others beautiful. As they rediscover their nastier natures, many drift between the realms of Madness and Passion, unfettered by the Illusion's restraints. The Unshackled can be the patient serial killer, the sexually violent Hollywood producer, or the performance artists who uses corpses in her masterpieces. Ironically, many Unshackled are closer to Awakening than most normal humans.

Drive: Torment/Vengeance

Strength: Cruelty, cunning, charismatic, relentless, remorseless, manipulative, prepared, stealthy, read other people's intentions, spot weaknesses

Challenge: 'Aberrant' behavior, telegraphs intentions, can't stop monologuing, impulsive behavior, obsessive nature, controlled by passions, perpetually alone, lacks empathy

Dark Secret: Obsessed with harming others (especially others that fit a 'type'), hunted by law enforcement, suffers mental illness, madness has attracted supernatural creatures, ruled by dark passions

Needs: Embrace their desires, no matter the cost

Wants: To sate their passions, to challenge society's limitations, to fill the inner void, to explore forbidden desires, to be in power, to tear down society

Aversion: Being hindered or shackled in any way, showing/experiencing empathy, being truthful, being punished for actions, weakness in others

Drives

Much of humanity remains firmly ensnared within the Illusion's insidious grip, their minds shackled by the Higher Powers and their Principles. Despite their individual natures, each NPC's goals and needs are governed by these outside influences – also known as their **Drive**. The GM can draw upon this concept when developing and portraying NPCs. They may also wish to consider its *intensity* (see sidebar). The GM can also incorporate this concept for PC who've fallen under the sway of the Higher Powers.

Typically, the NPC's Drive remains subtle, guiding their daily lives through minor distractions and unconscious thoughts. For others, the Principle dominates their entire existence, driving them into blind fanaticism and unwavering resolve. However, under certain circumstances, even the most reserved NPC can be consumed by their Drive's influence. In each case, Drive's effect on them manifests through either *external* and *internal* motivations.

External motivations manifest physically, playing upon the NPC's most basic desires, such as physiological needs and personal wellbeing. Typically, these motivations are immediate and constant, as they relate directly to the NPC's survival. However, depending on the affecting Principle, the NPC's external motivation may extend well beyond themselves, including their family, community, and even society itself. In short, for some NPCs, possessing financial security, religious freedom, and social stability is just as important as basic social needs, like food, water, and shelter.

Internal motivations manifest within the NPC's psychology, shaping their beliefs, desires, emotions, and thoughts. Their overall behaviors and goals stem from these needs, as they seek personal fulfillment and gratification. These also guide how the NPC views and establishes their roles within society as a whole. As such, internal motivations play an important role in their interpersonal relationships.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost,* these motivations also represent the NPC's personal prison, obscuring their self-actualization and preventing their Awakening. Only by overcoming these desires can the NPC loosen the Illusion's hold over them.

The NPC's Drive is Hierarchy. They are dedicated to maintaining society's hierarchical structures and define their self-worth by their rank and position. Individuality and personal freedoms are threats to the status quo. Anyone seeking to overturn the established order would need to be realigned – forcibly, if necessary. Typical motivations could include:

- **[External]** Serve the hierarchical structure at work for financial benefit.
- **[External]** Force and intimidate children and relatives into following the status quo.
- **[External]** Defend traditional values against all agitators and freethinkers.
- **[Internal]** Uphold a political party's ideals, even if acting against personal interests.
- **[Internal]** Faithfully volunteer at a local church to prove status within their spiritual community.
- **[Internal]** Continually better themselves, physically, mentally, and financially, in order to demonstrate personal superiority.

INTENSITY

Optionally, the GM can also determine how strong the NPC's Drive actually is; thus, reflecting their commitment to the Principle's precepts. They may simply choose one of the following or roll 1d10 to randomly determine the Drive's intensity.

1. New Beginnings/Potential: The Principle has only just begun affecting the NPC, revealing new possibilities and vast potential. They are inspired and infused with desire and energy to fulfill its precepts.

2. Collaboration/Harmony: The NPC and the Principle are in perfect union. They've begun integrating its precepts into their lives. However, this balance may blind them to outside influences, perpetuating their devotion and paralyzing their spirit.

3. Decisions/Growth: The NPC has reached a crossroads, be it for positive or negative reasons. In either case, they are deciding if the Principle serves their emotional/mental/spiritual needs and growth.

4. Structure/Standstill: The Principle dominates the NPC's existence and they've resigned themselves to it entirely. They no longer see beyond the Principle's influence; it simply is their life and nothing can change this. They're locked in perpetual ennui.

5. Instability/Conflict: The NPC's beliefs have been challenged, throwing them into conflict with the Principle. As a result, they are confused, frightened, and possibly violent. For some NPCs, this instability may lead to their Awakening.

6. Cooperation/Service: The NPC actively serves the Principle, devoting their lives to its precepts and expanding its hold over society. They do not see themselves as an individual, but part of the greater whole, defined solely through their service.

7. Knowledge/Reflection: The NPC is examining their faith in the Principle and its precepts. They're exploring the Principle's various aspects and its hold over humanity – and themselves – gleaning knowledge and wisdom in this pursuit.

8. Mastery/Triumph: The NPC has mastered the Principle, utilizing it to serve their worldly desires. Many have obtained some personal accomplishment, ascending above the Principle's dominating influence. However, they remain devoted to its underlying truths.

9. Abundance/Fulfillment: The NPC has obtained enlightenment through the Principle, embracing its every precept into their daily lives. They're on the verge of Awakening to its greater wonders, sensing the Higher Power – perhaps, even offering themselves to it.

10. Completion/Judgement: The NPC is consumed by the Principle, transcending beyond their limited perceptions. They're mere reflections of their ruling Archon/Death Angel, guided entirely by its machinations. In time, they may even seek out Metropolis/Inferno.

RELATIONS

Humans are social creatures that desire emotional and spiritual connections with those around them. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, this social interconnectivity is reflected through **Relations** (KDL, p. 170), which represent important relationships in a PC's life. In addition to established PC-to-PC Relations, these also include connections with important NPCs. They can be wide and varied, ranging from the PC's favorite barista to their beloved spouse, from their concerned proctor to an overbearing parent. In each case, interactions with the NPC lend the PC some form of personal significance, lending them inner strength and stability.

On the Intrigue Map, these Relations may represent Contacts, Leaders, and Groups/Organizations. As the story progresses, these relationships can evolve and affect the PCs, as well as influence the narrative. The following suggestions can help the GM manage these relationships, as well as better utilize Relations to expand the conversation and fiction.

Relation Strength

As discussed in Chapter 2, Relations can represent important hubs and links on the Intrigue Map (p. 47). Each social link is provided with a narrative descriptor for the relationship, as well as indicates its relation strength; for example, *does research for* **(0)**, *never judges* **(+1)** and *brotherly love* **(+2)**. The descriptor can guide the GM in roleplaying the NPC, as this represents their core motivation when dealing with the PC. These descriptors can also reveal why the relationship began, as well as why it continues. The GM is encouraged to ask questions to expand upon the established Relation and the circumstances it formed under. They and players are free to incorporate any unused PC Relation options or develop their own.

> During character creation, **The Detective** needs to establish three NPC Relations. He takes the unused informant option from their Archetype, described an NPC *who snitched for them back in the day* (**meaningful**, **+1**). Next, he describes his former partner from the police force, *who saved him from his addiction* (**vital**, **+2**). Finally, he creates the lady at the midnight cafe, *who always has pie for him* (**neutral**, **0**).

For most Relations, the relation strength will be **neutral (0)**. However, this does not mean these relationships lack true importance within the narrative. Indeed, they may be significant to the overall story and/or the PC's life, adding subtext and complimenting subplots. The GM can position them within the Intrigue Map, establishing intricate connections between the different hubs. Effectively, the **neutral** degree represents that the NPC plays some important role in the PC's life, but lacks true intimacy.

> Although **The Detective's** relationship with the Pie Lady is only **neutral (0)**, the player considers her narratively significant to their character. She and the midnight cafe are his sanctuary away from the death and ugliness of his work. Although he barely knows her, the woman's smile and friendliness provide him solace. The GM incorporates both the NPC and the Location into the fiction. As the game progresses, both become recurring features in the story.

More intense connections are reflected by **meaningful (+1)** and **vital (+2)** Relations. While many of these represent close friends and family, the GM and players can establish complex and compelling Relations that incorporate non-traditional relationships. As previously stated, these represent the PC's personal connections with their world. The Relation's strength effectively reflects how that relationship fulfills and sustains them mentally and spiritually. Indeed, the narrative importance of the PC's Relation may have little to no meaning for anyone else. Only the GM and player need to understand the significance, as well as how it can affect the story.

> **The Drifter** has a **meaningful (+1) Relation** with the park ranger, *who lets her camp for free*. She cares for him deeply, as he treats her like a human being. In contrast to her years of abuse and neglect, his small kindnesses have won her loyalty and respect. In many ways, she considers him family and will do anything to help him.

Finally, the GM and player should establish if the Relation's strength is mutual or represents an unevenly balanced relationship. Although the PC may consider the connection vital, it may only be **meaningful** or **neutral** to the NPC – if anything at all. These emotionally lopsided relationships can make for compelling narratives with numerous opportunities for roleplaying. Indeed, the GM may wish to create contrasting Relations, where the NPC feels the complete opposite of the PC. In effect, the PC's significance is based on their feelings for someone who doesn't reciprocate them – or may even be hateful towards them.

> **The Drifter** has a **vital (+2) Relation** to their daughter, whom they left behind. Struggling with her literal demons, she didn't wish to endanger the child she loves more than life itself. However, her daughter doesn't understand this sacrifice and hates her mother for abandoning her. Although the **vital Relation** affects *The Drifter*, it has little to no effect on the daughter – it may even be considered a negative **Relation** (see below).

CHANGING RELATIONS

Relationships continually evolve, being affected and altered by narrative events. As the story progresses, Relations can become more important to the PC, increasing their connection. Depending on the circumstances of this change, the GM may wish to also change the narrative descriptor, reflecting the new connection. These changes usually take place during downtime, but can occur in-game during dramatic moments.

> The PC's **neutral** street contact frequently gives them the lowdown **(0)**. However, after warding off crazed Hellers during the story, they become more reliant on each other. The **Relation** increases to **meaningful (+1)**, and their link is redefined as *bonded over adversity*. Although the contact still provides them information, their relationship continues to deepen. Optionally, the player can request this be increased to **vital (+2)**, reflecting the PC's desperate need for the **Relation**.

At the end of each session, players may request one Relation be changed by **+1** or **– 1** (*KDL*, p. 135). The player needs to explain the reason behind this change, as this affects the narrative and overall fiction. As above, these changes usually take place during downtime. However, depending on the Relation's importance to the story, the GM may request the PC resolve certain plot points in-game prior to changing its strength. Similarly, for fairness, if this Relation is with another PC, both players should agree upon the change, especially if they have a Relation as well.

> The PC's **meaningful Relation (+1)** with **The Deceiver** revolves around their shared *on-again-off-again relationship*. However, the PC learns of *The Deceiver's* infidelities and the player requests the **Relation** be reduced to **neutral**. Conversely, *The Deceiver's* player requests to increase their **Relation** strength with the PC to **vital (+2)**, reflecting their love and *desire to win them back*. Both players agree this will add new roleplaying opportunities, and the GM makes the appropriate changes to the Intrigue Map.

Completely new Relations can develop throughout the story, usually manifesting as **neutral** Relations; although, more intense interactions can raise the Relation strength further. Similarly, various Advantages and Moves can directly increase Relations, such as Forked Tongue and Seducer, or even spontaneously create them, such as Academic Network. In these cases, the GM and player should work together to best define the new NPC and their relationship. This can later be expanded during downtime, but should become an important and recurring part of their narrative – as well as the Intrigue Map, if necessary.

> The player fails the ***Keep It Together*** roll after confronting a Child of the Underworld. They become *obsessed* with it, gaining **+1 Relation**. Although this is a *negative* **Relation** (see below), the character succumbs to their unnatural attraction, dreaming and thinking of the creature constantly, and seeking it out at every opportunity. The GM adds this creature to the Intrigue Map and begins developing it further during downtime.

Relation Moves

As with important relationships, Relations can inspire and motivate the PCs, as well as influence their beliefs, feelings, and actions. Due to this intimacy, the PC can manipulate the Relation into doing odd or abhorrent things, all to preserve the emotional connection. Similarly, the PC may find it difficult to ignore the Relation's sway over them. The more powerful the connection, the harder their influence is to ignore. During the conversation, the following Moves can be used to represent these complex interactions. These optional Moves are in addition those listed in the core rulebook (*KDL*, p. 135.)

Take Advantage: The PC can attempt to *take advantage of their Relation*, using the shared intimacy to force the character into doing something outside their normal beliefs. For example, this can be an abusive use of *Influence Other* or some similar interaction. Prior to taking advantage of their trust, the player rolls ***Keep it Together***. On a *complete success* (15+), they may proceed as normal. On a *success with complications* **(10–14)**, they can proceed, but must reduce their **Relation** strength by one. In the case of *failure* **(–9)**, they cannot bring themselves to proceed, reduce their Relation value by one, and suffer –1 **Stability**. Note: these factors are in addition to any factors associated with the action itself.

Resist Influence: The PC can actively *resist someone's influence* when a **meaningful** or **vital Relation** emotionally forces them to act against their best interests. The player rolls ***Keep it Together***, subtracting the **Relation** strength – reflecting the difficulty to resist strong relationships. On a *complete success* (15+), they resist the influence and can deny the request. The **Relation** strength is reduced by one. On a *success with complications* **(10–14)**, they can choose to refuse the request, but suffer **–1 Stability**. In the case of *failure* **(–9)**, they cannot resist the request and must fulfill it accordingly. Also, the GM can require the **Relation** strength be increased.

Inflict Emotional Harm: A **Relation** can *inflict emotional harm* on the PC, or vice versa. In effect, they use the relationship against the target. The player must roll ***Keep it Together***, subtracting the **Relation** strength. On a *complete success* (15+), the emotional harm has no true lasting effects. The **Relation** strength can be immediately reduced by one. On a *success* with complications **(10–14)**, the PC suffers **–2 Stability**, but cannot reduce the **Relation** strength. In the case of *failure* **(–9)**, the emotional harm inflicts a condition on the PC (*KDL*, p. 126). The GM may request the **Relation** strength be increased by one.

INSPIRATION

Relations can extend beyond character motivations and inspire the PC to great feats and accomplishments. In effect, they strive harder to succeed or utilize the relationship to their advantage. With the GM's permission, the player can *add the value* of their Relation strength to rolls that directly affect and/or are associated with their Relation. These can include standard Moves, such as ***Helping or Hindering***, ***Influence Other***, and ***Read a Person***, as well as appropriate Advantages, such as ***Awe-Inspiring***, ***Crafty***, and ***Puppeteer***. Other rolls may be increased, if they are narratively appropriate.

The PC's **vital (+2) Relation** is bleeding out from an accidental gunshot wound. Being motivated to save their loved one completely focuses their attention. The GM allows the player **+2** on this specific ***Battlefield Medicine*** roll.

STABILITY

Relations also provide the PCs with comfort and solace during times of stress and terror, whether they're present or not. In effect, their feelings for the Relation help them maintain their composure and reduce – and even recover – their **Stability** loss. However, in contrast, when their Relation is directly threatened, the PC may have difficulty controlling their emotional state and suffer increased **Stability** losses.

With the GM's approval, the player may draw upon their relationship's emotional importance, adding their Relation strength to associated ***Keep it Together*** rolls. The player must adequately justify how the Relation is lending them *emotional support* under the circumstances. However, if the Relation is in danger, the GM may impose an emotional burden, subtracting the Relation's strength from the ***Keep it Together*** roll.

The PC has been buried alive and must ***Keep it Together*** to avoid panicking. They must get back to their lover (**meaningful, +1**), who is in trouble – gaining **+1** on their roll from this inspiration and resolve. However, in contrast, if their lover is buried and the PC must ***Keep it Together***, the emotional burden makes this more difficult, and the PC suffers **–1** on the roll.

Relations can help relieve emotional stress and trauma, as per the Regain **Stability** Move (*KDL*, p. 135). Adhering to the Agenda, *Keep the PCs on edge, only allowing them moments of respite*, the GM should allow the PCs opportunities to engage with their Relations between times of high anxiety and tension. As long as the interaction is significant to the PC, they receive the Move's associated **Stability** recovery. In addition, these encounters accentuate the conversation and further establish the relationship in the fiction. Indeed, these intimate moments may justify the Relation's strength being increased at the session's end (see above).

Trapped in Metropolis, the *shaken* PC discovers an old rotary phone that miraculously connects them with their home. Their young son (**vital, +2**) picks up and begins telling them about his day at school, oblivious to the situation. After the call ends, the PC is calmed and reenergized by their child's voice. They regain **+2 Stability**, raising them up to *uneasy*.

Despite their benefits, Relations can come with great cost and potential trauma, as per the **Lose Stability** Move (*KDL*, p. 135). However, the GM should not cavalierly harm and/or kill off Relations to simply inflict the **Stability** loss associated with this Move. These dramatic moments extend far beyond game mechanics; they are life-altering events and can have severe consequences that resonate throughout the narrative for prolonged periods. Upon mutual consensus, the GM and player may inflict appropriate Disadvantages or temporarily lower the PC's permanent **Stability** – in addition, to the standard **Stability** loss.

The PC is asked to identify the body of their mentor (**meaningful, +1**). Their naked body was left in a shallow grave, following a sexually violent murder. As per the ***Lose Stability*** Move, the PC suffers **–2 Stability**. However, the PC considered the mentor their true parental figure, as established in the fiction. The player temporarily takes the ***Nightmares*** Disadvantage, reflecting the emotional impact.

Alternate Relations

In some cases, Relations are not with NPCs; instead, they represent emotional connections to important aspects of the PC's world, such as objects, places, and even monsters. This may be due to the PC's antisocial nature or life circumstances, i.e., the character places more value on an animal companion or private sanctuary. In some cases, these are *negative* Relations (see below), reflecting fears, obsessions, and unwanted obligations. The GM and player work together to develop the Relation's nature, as well as its place on the Intrigue Map. As with human Relations, they can make Moves that represent the emotional comforts and stresses of this relationship. Similarly, depending on in-game circumstances, the player may request changes to the Relation's strength. If the item/location are harmed or destroyed, the PC suffers the associated ***Lose Stability*** Move.

The Occultist possesses a **vital Relation (+2)** with their dream temple – a secret garden built atop an abandoned hospital. Whenever they need to reflect and calm themselves, they meditate and rest in this verdant sanctuary (***Regain Stability***). Later in the story, the GM introduces cultists of The Herald of Violence into the hospital, who potentially threaten the location. If they damage or destroy it, *The Occultist* will suffer emotional trauma (***Lose Stability***).

FACTIONAL RELATIONS

Alternatively, the PCs can have Relations with Groups and Organizations, be they allies or enemies. The relational strength reflects the PC's personal connections and reputation within the membership as a whole, rather than with specific individuals. The GM may impose requirements from the Group/Organizations for the PC to maintain their Relation strength, such as attendance, dues, favors. Constant failure to uphold this relationship may lead to negative consequences, including **Stability** loss.

The Veteran's weekly support group has become **vital (+2)** to them over the years. Like them, its members have served in the military and are coping with various emotional and mental traumas. Sharing their experiences in a safe, understanding environment, provides the PC with emotional support. As the group's eldest member, *The Veteran* is sometimes asked to take new arrivals under their wing.

NEGATIVE RELATIONS

Not all relationships are positive in nature, yet they can have profound influences on the PC's life and emotional well-being. These Relations can include direct adversaries, such as their *Competitor* or *Nemesis*, and the Leaders of opposing Groups and Organizations. They may also be intimates, such as ex-lovers and disgruntled family members, who are hostile to the PC. Relationships based on hatred can be as affecting and powerful as love.

Although it may appear counterintuitive, the Relation strength does not immediately change and/or weaken for these negative Relations, i.e., the degrees of **meaningful (+1)** and **vital (+2)**. Instead, they reflect the relationship's intensity and how deeply it continually affects the PC's life. If their Relation abruptly ends, the PC still suffers from the loss, as they're left with an emotional void and deprived of this personal motivation. As with losing positive Relations, the anxieties and traumas do not simply fade away, lingering long afterwards.

> The PC's **meaningful Relation** ends after their ***Stalker*** is dragged into Inferno. Despite the freedom this provides, the emotional scars inflicted by their tormentor remain. They continually look for their ***Stalker's*** face in the crowds, instinctively lock their doors and windows, and never feel safe when the phone rings. The emotional connection cannot be easily broken, even though it negatively affects their life.

Resonance

An NPC's life is not static or sequestered, and may be narratively affected by the PCs' actions – even if they never meet. **Resonance** reflects the relationship between the PCs and the setting. As they interact with NPCs, the PCs may positively – or negatively – change their nature. This character evolution could alter their normal beliefs and thoughts, or even their core personality, in extreme cases. Furthermore, much like ripples in a pond, these character changes resonate outward, affecting those closest to the NPC. The GM can use these as Holds, making Moves later in the story. More profound resonance may require the Intrigue Map to be adjusted, as well as alter the fiction.

> The PC (Monica) goes out of her way to help a complete stranger (Nancy), who is being stalked by the current story's antagonist. During downtime, the GM expands Nancy into a full NPC and has her become Monica's unseen benefactor in the next storyline. Monica finds herself receiving help from people, yet never knowing why.

Another consideration is how the NPC views their interaction with the PC. Depending on their personal biases and beliefs, their perception may be completely skewed or prejudiced. Again, the resonance can be either positive or negative, continuing to ripple outward – even without the PC's knowledge.

> While pushing her Contact (Hector) for information, Monica inadvertently humiliates him. Feeling betrayed, Hector poisons Monica's reputation with his close associates – and they do the same with their friends. Later in the story, Monica engages with another NPC, only to discover she's earned a negative reputation, i.e., the GM uses a resonance Move.

LEGIONS OF DARKNESS

Much like non-player characters, Groups and Organizations are living, breathing entities with complex backgrounds, motivations, and personalities. These collections of individuals share common aspirations and goals, working to change the world to meet their vision, and better themselves in the process. Within the whole, each group's members embrace their shared identity, even as they strive to gain influence and power for themselves. The following section details how to design compelling Groups/Organizations, as well as incorporate their unique qualities into the fiction.

For ease, throughout the following section, the designation of Cult is considered synonymous with both Groups and Organizations, i.e., a biker gang (Group) and multilevel marketing corporation (Organization) can both be referred to as *cults*. The rules and suggestions provided below are equally valid for both hub types.

Purpose

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, groups and organizations can be categorized into different Archetypes, which reflect their general goals and purpose. However, as with NPCs, these individual Archetypes can have multiple incarnations and means, reflecting each cult's unique nature. In each case, they will fall under one of three personas: *Public*, *Private*, or *Secret*. These classifications reflect their established role in the setting, but do not necessarily reflect their true Purpose. Some *public* cults can have secretive dealings behind their seemingly benign appearance. In contrast, secret groups may maintain public contacts for recruitment and acquiring resources. The persona simply reflects their mainstructure and operations in carrying out their Purpose.

> **Public** groups/organizations operate with recognized roles within general society, operating according to standard agendas and philosophies. Even if they serve the Higher Powers, the cult's tactics and operations are more orthodox and structured, publicly working toward their ultimate agenda. Academic groups, corporate entities, government agencies, philanthropic foundations, and social groups usually fall under this definition.
>
> **Private** groups/organizations operate behind closed doors, obscuring much of their general activities from the public sector. They have specific requirements and qualifications to join, such as ideological beliefs, educational status, wealth and prestige, sociocultural customs, and ethnicities. The reasoning behind their need for privacy can vary wildly, from the benign to the nefarious. They usually have strict codes and regulations to govern their inner circle, as well as set hierarchies. Private groups can include familial groups, social clubs, think tanks, street gangs, criminal enterprises, religious sects, and pop-culture groups.
>
> **Secret** groups/organizations operate through clandestine means, highly restricting and controlling their membership to avoid detection. These

cabals, cults, and secretive societies engage in morally questionable activities, frequently bending and breaking laws and cultural taboos. Many are actively seeking, controlling, and/or worshipping what lies beyond, such as the Higher Powers or Forgotten Gods. Their members are usually more radical and chaotic, lost to their strange ideas and beliefs, as well as consumed by their shared desires. Ultimately, secret groups are devoted to their personal agendas and tenants, and will go to tremendous lengths to defend and hide them.

No matter their persona, these groups/organizations have specific Purposes for existing. Below are common Archetypes these cults can fall under, helping the GM to develop their agendas and overall structures.

CONSPIRACY

Conspiracy cults consist of like-minded people who sense humanity's imprisonment, but lack the knowledge and power to achieve true enlightenment. Instead, they try to explain the Illusion through various conspiracy theories, such as ancient aliens, cryptozoology, and the New World Order. From ghost hunters to Flat Earthers, these groups continually strive to discover the 'truth' and prove their beliefs to the world. Unfortunately, some conspiracy cults can become increasingly radicalized, twisting their theories into mistrust and xenophobia. Very rarely, conspiracy cults get things *right*, which usually ends in their destruction by the Archons and their minions.

Dreamland (Public): This loosely connected group of UFO believers has expanded worldwide, devoting themselves to uncovering governmental dealings with extraterrestrials. Recently, they've focused on the increasing UFO activity near CERN, where they believe the Large Hadron Collider has opened a portal to another dimension.

Maabes (Private): Also known as the *Scarlet Warriors*, Maabes seek to root out sex trafficking and pedophilia rings in northern Europe. They believe that underground stations host illegal prisons, and trains transport victims across the country, destined for the sex-farms of the elite. In recent years, they've grown increasingly brazen, breaking into city infrastructure to find these hidden facilities. They either take public pedophilia scandals as a win, or dismiss them as false flags.

5Global (Private): This technophobic organization believes that cell-phone technology is warping humanity, mentally and physically. Their beliefs are xenophobic and radically anti-globalism, believing the entire world should be taken off the grid. Ironically, they utilize the Internet and similar technologies to engage in their activism.

CONTROL

Control cults consist of society's power-brokering, privileged, and affluent members, who seek to expand their dominion over humanity at any cost. Although they rarely have direct interaction with nonhuman entities, many control cults are unknowing thralls to the Archons and Death Angels. Many control groups have both public and private personas, allowing them to operate on multiple levels of society with impunity. Outwardly, they command their underlings from draconian boardrooms and carouse with their peers in swanky gentlemen's clubs. Meanwhile, behind closed doors, their members strive to push the world away from Enlightenment and deeper into servitude.

The Auspicious Brotherhood (Secret): After the Unfortunate Incident in 1826, surviving members of the disbanded Janissary corps formed the Auspicious Brotherhood. Regaining their power over two centuries, the organization influences corporate and political power throughout Eurasia. Its inner circle, devotes of the Death Angel Samael, strive to return the Ottoman Empire to its former glory.

The Foundation (Secret): This covert organization believes serving the Supreme Architect is its sacred duty, secretly guiding humanity toward stability. In truth, the hierarchal group believes only its members understand what course society should take, and continually manipulate and suppress cultural and technological advances. Lictors utilize the Foundation to maintain the Illusion worldwide.

The Heritage Union (Public): This philanthropic organization devotes its wealth and power to maintaining historical sites. In truth, its upper ranks of aristocrats and elitists strive to manipulate and protect powerful bloodlines. Rather than focus on any form of *noblesse oblige*, they push affluent and influential families into arranged marriages. Their upper echelons control entire corporate and political empires, furthering their new aristocracy.

CORRUPTION

Corruption groups are collectives of people who share forbidden desires and needs. They establish systems for maintaining private communications, resources, and sanctuaries, which allows them to indulge their hungers in relative safety. These groups frequently infiltrate every aspect of society, offering their members infinite freedom to strip away social norms. Orgies, drugs, and murder are provided to entice and control their members. Many groups keep pictures and videos of their members' deeds on file, as few wish to self-incriminate by revealing the group's crimes (or even their totally legal and consensual deviancies). Creatures of Passion and Death Angels frequently direct corruption cults, feeding off the shameful cycle of anguish and pleasure.

The Red Door (Private): This collection of private sex clubs are located in suburban areas across the globe. Entrance is invitation-only; its diverse membership seems random and includes every social strata. Behind its eponymous red door, each club provides unspeakable pleasures and torments, allowing patrons to indulge in their most vile dreams.

The Traveling Horror Show (Secret): As if by magic, the Traveling Horror Show appears in small towns overnight – usually in an abandoned building. Inside the garish funhouse, visitors discover progressively horrific displays of gore and torment. Those who delve deeper into the depravity are drawn into the Death Angel Golab's citadel, joining the Horror Show's demonic cast.

The Lazslo Group (Private): This residential company builds gated communities, offering its homeowners safety from outside influences. However, the Group's mandatory 'cultural meetings' indoctrinate residents with clannish beliefs and xenophobic attitudes. Members are required to perform acts of loyalty, sacrifice possessions, and even breed with council members – all to strengthen the community.

DOOMSDAY

Also known as death cults, doomsday groups continually prepare for the coming apocalypse, believing they – and only they – are destined to rule the new world. Some cults embrace more nihilistic beliefs, abandon all hope, and even seek to ring in the end times. Doomsday groups are usually well-prepared and able to access resources and weapons; ardent members live in protected and sequestered locations. The Higher Powers and Forgotten Gods guide these groups toward self-destruction and acts of domestic terrorism. In particular, Sathariel, Togarini, and She Who Waits Below infest humanity with the need to forsake life and embrace oblivion. Death cults can be extremely dangerous, lacking self-preservation instinct, and seeking to 'liberate' unbelievers from life's prison.

Agartha (Private): This death cult believes this world and our bodies are prisons of emotion and trauma. Its members, the Tranquil, seek to purge themselves of all earthly needs and physical torments. Although unaware of the Illusion, Agartha's inner teachings open its members to Limbo, where their minds frequently travel. Some Tranquil never return to their bodies, while some other members kill themselves, desperately trying to be free.

Niflheim's Children (Secret): Devoted to the goddess, Hel, this white supremacist doomsday cult devotes itself to ushering in Ragnarök. Well-organized, they incite racial violence and economic instability through acts of terrorism and fear-mongering, weakening the Illusion. Their 'living goddess' is actually an Incarnation of the Death Angel Gamichicoth.

Todestrieb (Private): Few know the origins of this online group, but Todestrieb sites continuously pop up. Its pseudo-religious teachings promise its members release from fear and suffering through self-destruction. Those who survive its grotesque trials gain knowledge to pass through the Inner Labyrinth and into She Who Waits Below's embrace.

ENLIGHTENMENT

Composed of academics, researchers, and rebels alike, enlightenment groups continually gather information on the Truth. Their members are disquiet, sensing the wrongness around them, instinctively knowing that their world isn't as it appears. Some are ancient scholars amassi libraries of dusty tomes and radical writings, while others are pioneering innovators testing the boundaries of science and reason. Enlightenment groups seek to peel away the scales from humanity's eyes and thrust their faces into the True Reality. Due to their inherent nature, many enlightenment cults serve the Archon Malkuth, either actively or out of ignorance. This relentless search for forbidden knowledge makes most enlightenment groups prime targets for humanity's Jailers.

The Fifth House (Public): An amalgamation of bloggers, Internet journalists, and urban explorers, the Fifth House amasses and distributes information regarding global paranormal phenomena. However, unlike most conspiracy groups, its members simply document and record, rather than offer hypotheses. They believe knowledge is humanity's right, no matter what the cost.

Horizon Knights (Private): This spiritual school teaches its members that they are connected to Gods. Through philosophical and phenomenological studies and conditioning, each member traverses the horizon of their existence and connects with these ancient deities. In doing so, they gain enlightenment and paranormal abilities. Truthfully, this cult is the gateway for Dream Wanderers to reenter the physical realm, possessing the willing Knights.

The Zorze Sisterhood (Secret): This neopagan group devotes itself to the Rozhanitsy – the Slavic trinity goddess (Mother, Maiden, Crone). Living in secluded communities, they seek signs from the divine in the auroras and the world's natural changes. In doing so, they've connected to Gaia's primal forces, slowly eroding the Illusion. Elders members have transcended Elysium's jail and entered the primordial realm, eventually returning transformed forever.

POLITICAL

Political organizations seek to control society by enforcing their dogmatic ideologies upon civil, state, and federal governments. These can be corporate lobbyists, social activists, and political parties, all seeking to gain power and popularity. As the world becomes increasingly polarized, dysfunctional behavior and radicalization within these groups has risen exponentially. As such, extremists and terrorist cells frequently fall under this Archetype, as these cults force their beliefs upon society through violent means. Nonhuman entities constantly infiltrate these groups, especially agents of the Archons. More violent groups attract the Death Angels and other creatures, eager to feed upon the chaos they inflict.

European Preservation Council (Public): Also called the EPC, this organization devotes itself to sustaining Caucasian purity and dominance. Its lobbyists influence governments in North America and Europe, pushing anti-immigrant and white supremacist agendas. It also filters monies to more radicalized groups, manipulating them to encourage racial tensions – thus confirming their call for change.

Urban Revivalist Union (Private): Devoted to urban renewal, the URU uses its wealth, political weight, and social influence to gentrify failing urban areas across the world. When gentle persuasion doesn't work, the organization covertly arranges the forcible removal of homeless and lower income families. The URU's upper echelon are lictors, working to heal the Illusion and buttress Elysium's boundaries.

Poing Serré (Public): Also known as Diamond Dogs, these tormented refugees and civilians banded together during the First Ivorian Civil War. Initially, the group helped bring conflict diamond trade to the world's attention. Now, influenced by the Archon Chesed, they seek to rebuild their home and the countries around them into another Eden. Secretly, the group's paramilitary elements hunt and execute their former oppressors, using their blood to renew the country's soil.

RELIGIOUS

In *KULT: Divinity Lost,* religious cults represent the most prevalent and diverse Groups and Organizations. Usually influenced by the Higher Powers, their membership walks the razor's edge between belief and fanaticism, eagerly serving their Principles. Driven by a craving to believe in something larger than themselves, many offer their bodies and souls to gods and monsters alike, as well as their earthly representatives. Humans flock to charismatic leaders, be they human or not, devoting themselves completely. Religious groups create their own philosophies and mythologies to explain reality. Whatever their reasons, members serve the group's goals with unwavering dedication, even when faced with the ugliest truths.

The Rosicrucians (Public): This mystical society combines esotericism, various religions, and artistic symbolism into an unorthodox theology. They seek divine wisdom from spiritual art and music from across the world, receiving messages from beyond. A lictor, their de facto leader, serves the Archon Tiphareth and guides the cult and media community toward worshipping her Principle.

The Communion (Secret): Originating in 1970s California, the Communion gathered sexually confused and repressed young adults and offered them sanctuary from the judgmental outside world. Through love-bombing and sexual rituals, the group breaks down each recruit's inhibitions, and indoctrinates them into the Communion's perverse teachings. Its members are extremely devout and secretive, controlling large sections of the sex industry. Passion creatures frequently live amongst their ranks.

The Church of the Silver City (Public): This highly conservative religious order devotes themselves to returning God's Kingdom to earth, believing they are merely bricks in his great city. Its members strive to achieve purity of mind and spirit, including through flagellation and penance. Their membership has infiltrated several political parties and companies, trying to purge society of its wickedness.

SENTINEL

Sentinel groups devote themselves to protecting some aspect of the True Reality, be it an artifact, creature, demigod, or location. Many members are quasi-religious, believing they serve some sacred duty, while others act out of honor, greed, or self-preservation. Sentinel groups may defend their ward against the outside world or try to protect humanity from its potential threat. Tightly knit and secretive, members are carefully selected and well-trained. Many belong to families or clannish groups, passing on their vital responsibility from generation to generation. Due to their nature, many sentinel groups actively work with or for humanity's Jailers.

Neophytes of the Dreamer (Secret): The Neophytes watch over the sleeping body of an incredibly powerful Dream Princess. In their secluded monastery, this small sect makes certain she remains heavily sedated, trying to suppress her REM sleep and night terrors, which can manifest in reality. Even drugged, the Dreamer's mind wanders and inflicts mental trauma on anyone sleeping within two miles of her body.

Cain's Children (Private): Cain's Children are loosely affiliated bikers, law enforcement, transport officials, and truckers, who patrol the highways and backroads of North America. They protect and worship Cain – one of Astaroth's manifestations, which wanders the country randomly murdering and torturing innocents. The cult believes if the entity is discovered and destroyed, God's vengeance upon humanity will be sevenfold.

The Latchkeys (Private): The Walden Family are considered eccentric millionaires, who come from old money. In truth, for generations, the Waldens have devoted themselves to watching over Crooked House. The grand estate resides outside Time & Space, continually changing and reconfiguring itself. The Latchkeys protect this portal from those who'd use it, as well as prevent the things inside from escaping into Elysium. Only those deemed worthy of carrying this burden secret may marry into the family.

STALKER

The opposite of sentinel cults, stalker groups actively seek out and destroy all threats to the Illusion. They manipulate the media, destroy evidence, and cover up any incidents that may reveal the Truth. When more direct measures are required, they frequently threaten and even 'disappear' witnesses. Most stalker groups directly or loosely belong to government and law enforcement agencies, which are, in turn, controlled by the Higher Powers and their minions. This provides their membership with impressive resources, contacts, and power, allowing them to work outside the law.

SDS-17 (Public): Colloquially called 'The Nightmare Squad,' Special Detective Squad 17 operates throughout the Tokyo metropolis, investigating supernatural phenomena. Their unorthodox methods, violent nature, and immunity from prosecution makes them feared and reviled amongst normal law enforcement.

The Mourners (Private): Survivors and grieving relatives, the Mourners began as an Internet support group. Recognizing commonalities in their shared stories, these broken people banded together to hunt and destroy the creatures that tormented them and stole their loved ones. The group's main targets are Children of the Underworld. Over several years, the group has amassed an impressive amount of information, as well as killed several Children.

Daedalus House (Private): A multinational law firm with intimate connections to global corporations, governments, and law enforcement agencies, Daedalus House secretly engages in a secret war to maintain the Illusion. It sends out trained agents wherever threats to Elysium appear, eliminating them with military precision.

SURVEILLANCE

Unlike sentinels and stalkers, surveillance groups do not actively combat or protect their chosen targets. Instead, they covertly observe and gather information about the Illusion and its mysteries. Many surveillance groups belong to or are controlled by humanity's Jailers, feeding information to stalker organizations. Others accumulate knowledge for their own personal benefit, such as achieving power or obtaining enlightenment. Surveillance groups can be completely innocuous, searching for Truth out of curiosity – or even boredom. While most sects are peaceful, some surveillance cults defend their amassed wisdom violently.

The Hurricaners (Private): This eccentric band of armchair historians amass information about the Event – when the Illusion shattered across North America during the 1900 Galveston hurricane. They frequently make pilgrimages along the hurricane's destructive path. They call this 'the Scar,' and have linked strange phenomena and deaths to its path. They've documented several Time/Space portals that connect back to 1900.

The Railway Men (Public): In the late-1800s, New York's Rapid Transit Construction Company formed this obscure civil office. Its members patrol and watch over the subway systems and underground infrastructure, documenting unusual activity. They're fully aware of the threats lurking beneath the city and strive to study them. Their reports are fed to other civic departments more capable of combating the rising darkness.

The Unspoken Ministry (Secret): Formerly part of the East German Stasi, the Unspoken Ministry once spied on the citizenry and country alike, searching for signs of the Illusion's decay. Despite political changes, the Ministry survives – albeit heavily diminished in size and resources. Its agents continue documenting any and all unusual occurrences in Germany and surrounding countries, reporting to the Administrator: a lictor devoted to the Archon Binah.

Qualities

As with NPCs, Groups and Organizations have specific personal qualities, which the GM can use to develop them into intriguing and realistic entities. In addition to their Purpose, these various characteristics help define how the cult and its membership operate internally and externally, its background and relationships, and any specific abilities and resources. The GM can draw upon this information when introducing the cult into the conversation, as well as establishing the fiction. These qualities may also affect its position on the Intrigue Map and influence over the PCs' daily lives.

The core Group/Organization qualities are listed in the sidebar, as well as discussed individually below. As always, the GM is free to complete as much or as little of this information as required for their game.

GROUP/ORGANIZATIONS QUALITIES

- Type (Group/Organization)
- Name
- Purpose
- Ties to Powers
- Agenda
- Membership
- Leadership
- Attributes
- Moves
- History
- Relationships
- Description

TIES TO POWERS

Ties to Powers reflects the group's connection to the Illusion, as well as the Principles guiding its overall agenda. Depending on the group's membership, more than one Higher Power may hold sway over its daily operations and leadership. Although many organizations are ignorant of the Higher Powers' influence, some are fully aware of the existential forces they serve. The cult's Purpose may also determine the strength of this connection. For example, religious sects may actively and knowingly worship the Higher Power, while control groups may be unaware that their actions are guided by an unseen benefactor.

The Grave Tenders (Organization): A society of morticians, the Grave Tenders are tied to the trinity of Dead Gods residing in Metropolis. Secretly, they prepare human bodies to be offered up as undead servants to these ancient deities. In return, they receive funerary gifts and trinkets, as well as personal comfort in knowing the Dead Gods will not rise from their graves.

AGENDA

Agenda describes the cult's primary desires and goals, which usually align with its core Purpose. As discussed above, the organization's agenda may differ depending on its persona: *public*, *private*, or *secretive*. Furthermore, its leadership may be aware of goals while its core membership are not, creating disparities in group knowledge. For example, many health professionals working for the *Liljenberg Institute* (*KDL*, p. 249) are blissfully unaware of the cruel medical experiments conducted by its higher echelons. From this agenda, the GM can also create **Milestones** for the group, which may run concurrently with the main storyline. Furthermore, they may directly conflict with the agendas of other Groups, creating intriguing side plots.

The Night-Stalkers (Group): A small control group, the Night-Stalkers are professional criminals. Their core Agenda is to perform profitable jobs and stay out of jail. Due to their expertise and knowledge, the six-man crew are frequently employed by non-human clients that need services performed in Elysium. The GM sets them against the PCs; each group trying to steal the same arcane artifact.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership refers to the organization's most prevalent constituents, including their demographic traits, such as culture, beliefs, social status, and location. Member recruitment also depends on the organization's agenda and Purpose, as well as its *leadership* structure. Each organization may have mandatory requirements to join its ranks, such as possessing certain skills and traits. New members may also need to complete certain steps to prove their worth, such as completing rituals, swearing loyalty, and/or paying tithes. The GM should briefly develop any prominent NPCs, especially if they'll interact directly with the PCs. These can include Contacts on the Intrigue Map, linking the PC to the cult indirectly.

The Fisher Kings (Group): The tight-knit gang operates along the docks, and recruits it membership from local families. New members can only be invited by an existing member. From that point, both Pledger and Pledgee are equally responsible for each other's actions, making loyalty paramount. All swear fealty to the gang leader, as well as promise to protect their community with their lives.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership refers to the organization's hierarchical structure, be it formal or informal. *Formal* groups are specifically created to achieve some predetermined agenda. Informal groups form spontaneously, usually through shared common interests and goals. The GM should provide one or two Leaders and prominent few lieutenants, who oversee and guide the group's activities and membership. Depending on the group's Purpose, there may be secret organizational structures, such as illicit activities hidden from the lower echelons.

The Kayra Foundation (Organization): This formalized philanthropic society devotes its resources to preserving Siberia's natural resources. Its leadership consists of a President, Chancellor, and Board of Directors. The President operates the foundation's daily activities through Department Heads, while answering directly to the Chancellor. The Board of Directors remains secretive; only the Chancellor knows they are ancient forest spirits trapped in Elysium.

ATTRIBUTES

As with NPCs and Creatures, Groups/Organizations can be assigned **Attributes**, which represent the group's overall power, influence, and resources in Elysium – and possibly beyond. In some cases, the GM may wish to alter the cult's Attributes during downtime to reflect narrative consequences and changes, including **Reactions** (see *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46). For example, the group may be destroyed or subsumed by another organization, forever altering its place on the Intrigue Map. In contrast, it may accomplish its agenda or fulfill its Purpose, gaining new influence and resources.

Combat represents the group's various abilities to protect and expand its assets, usually through physical means. These can include access to weapons and equipment, law enforcement protection, hardened facilities, trained members, and even extortion. It may also reflect the group's specific membership, such as their numbers and martial skills.

Influence represents the group's economic power and societal authority, as well as their ability to affect other organizations. These resources can include political clout, economic might, media contacts, and public reputation. Influence can also represent the organization's controlled territory and global presence, be it physical or economic.

Magic signifies the group's knowledge of the Truth and their magical resources. This can include the cult's innate magical potential and their connection to the Higher Powers. Magic also determines its membership's magical awareness and training, including their ability to pierce the Illusion. Groups with high Magic may also control and/or work with nonhuman entities and portals/gates.

Attribute ranks also determine the number and type of **Moves** the group/organization has access to. An organization's Moves are determined by its Attribute Ranks in Combat/Influence/Magic, **equaling one Move per attribute rank**; i.e., an organization with Combat [3] would have three Combat Moves.

ATTRIBUTE RANKS

[–] **None**: The cult has little to no resources to draw upon, beyond its membership's personal abilities.

[1] **Limited**: The cult can only access finite amounts of assets. These resources are very localized, such as a building/neighborhood. Expending them will potentially tax the organization for some time.

[2] **Respectable**: The cult has access to considerable assets and resources, which can be used with some degree of freedom. These extend throughout their local area, such as their city/town/etc.

[3] **Substantial**: The cult's resources are truly formidable. They can expend most of them without hesitation, as well as access outside assets with little effort. This also affords them personal renown/fear, easily extending beyond their local area, such as their state/country/etc.

[4] **Vast**: The cult's resources are effectively inexhaustible and widespread. They can access virtually anything within reason, all at a moment's notice. More rare items may take them time. Their power is countrywide, potentially having numerous locations across Elysium.

[5] **Unlimited**: The cult's power is effectively godlike, allowing them to expend their assets with no regard and access the rarest resources with little effort. Their abilities may extend throughout Elysium and even into other Realms of Existence.

MOVES

Moves represented are soft and hard Moves the GM can use for the group, as well as its individual leaders and membership. The GM may choose as Attribute Moves equal to the group's level in that specific Attribute; i.e., Combat, Influence, and Magic. However, depending on the group's overall concept, the GM may allow additional Moves, above their associated Attribute. For example, if the group is magically mundane, but has special access to Limbo through the Net, the GM can provide them with a related Magic Move.

The group's Moves should be reflective of its Purpose and agenda. The Unique Moves in the core rulebook (*KDL*, p. 183, 188) can provide inspiration for the GM when developing group/organization Moves appropriate to their campaign. They should reflect the group's specific abilities and core concepts. As such, the GM is free to invent their own; potentially exceeding the standard Attribute rank. Typically, the GM should provide one Move per Attribute ranking, i.e., Combat [3] would have one Limited, one Respectable, and one Substantial Move. However, the GM can provide the group with more powerful Moves, if appropriate to their fiction. For example, an organization of arms dealers may have access to Combat Moves well beyond their rank.

Her Church of Yielding Sorrows (Organization): Devoted to the Death Angel Sathariel, this small death cult wields respectable martial and magic power, yet is confined to its limited geographical territory; Combat [2], Influence [1], Magic [3]. This provides the cult with two Combat Moves, one Influence Move, and three Magic Moves.

The group's Combat Moves are *Summon Additional Members* and *Pull Victim into the Depths*, reflecting their connection to the Underworld and its creatures. Their Influence Move is *Use Secrets of the Streets*, representing their spies and connections with the local homeless. Finally, their Magic Moves include *Reveal limited insight into the Underworld*, *Use Journeyman Death Magic*, and *Spread the Principles of Sathariel*. The latter Move is normally beyond their Attribute rank, but reflects the cult's intimate connection to the Death Angel.

HISTORY

History briefly outlines the group's historical overview, documenting their time from conception to current day. The GM should fully detail any major events, if any, as well as any significant changes in the group's leadership. Depending on the organization's agenda and leadership, the GM may also include its hidden history, detailing its unseen dealings and events. This information can be woven into its various interactions with other groups/organizations (see *Relationships*).

The Arcane Institute (Organization): A private club for magic enthusiasts, the Arcane Institute formed during Victorian London's supernatural craze. Initially, the club offered sanctuary and camaraderie for magicians and illusionists. However, a seance opened a portal to Inferno, resulting in several members being possessed. Guided by these 'Avatars of the Other Side' the group delved into darker magicks, seeking to expand their power. Now, the Institute's mediums offer spiritual insight to major players in the financial and political arenas, while maintaining its innocent veneer.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships detail the organization's current interactions with other groups/organizations. Even secret organizations have some interaction with the world around them; although, this interaction may be clandestine in nature. Each relationship can be reflected on the Intrigue Map, including with links with the PCs.

To inspire narrative conflict and interconnectivity, the GM should develop at least one *alliance* and one *adversary* for each core group. The background for these interactions may stem from its agenda, Purpose, and Ties to the Powers. The GM should also determine if the group would help or hinder the PCs, as well as their desires and motivations for interacting with them.

The Avadhuta (Group): Seeking eccentric holiness, this collective of ascetics has forsaken their earthly goods. They've camped around an old war memorial, which brought them into continuous conflict with the local authorities. However, they've garnered an alliance with the street gang controlling the area, which provides them rudimentary protection. The Avadhuta willingly assist the PCs by teaching them their divine magic.

DESCRIPTION

Description provides the full overview of the group. By incorporating the qualities above, the GM can flesh out the entire group, adding any additional details and information here. She can also ask questions, such as the following:

What is the group's ideology? Does the organization have political, religious, or business ideologies? If so, what are they and how are they tied into the group's agenda?

How does the group survive? How does it finance its operations? Do they collect membership fees or produce goods/services? Do they share their resources with others outside the group?

What are their core traditions, such as rituals, celebrations, and vows? Do they utilize specific clothing, signals, tattoos, or other signs to recognize each other? Are they secretive or public in their communications and recruitment?

What are the group's personal interactions like? Do they have specific social norms and expectations? Do they have any specific taboos or restrictions? Why are they adhere to? Did they come from the group's history? How easily can they recognize outsiders due to these social cues?

Where are their headquarters and gathering locations? Where are the leaders located? Does the group meet in specific places, such as office buildings, backwoods, or subterranean rooms?

What tactics/resources do they utilize to fulfill their agenda? Does the group have special monetary, political, and magical resources? If so, what are they and how do they use them? Does the group have contacts with non-human entities? How does the group operate, especially with enemies? Do they attack them directly or through subterfuge?

What are the group's public interactions like, if any? Are they recognized in normal society? Do they give back to their communities and, if so, why? Are they popular or misunderstood in the public mind? How do these interactions help/hinder their agenda?

Example of Organization Building

As an **Agent**, the PC was involved in an Interpol raid on an underworld temple, discovering people involved in grotesque rituals (***Occult Experience***). To their shock, the arrested cultists were released and the incident covered up. Haunted by what they saw, the PC now tries to uncover the organization's dirty secrets. The GM takes these notes and begins fleshing out the group's description, naming it *The Virtus Club*, and connecting it to the PC on the Intrigue Map.

She begins developing the cult (Group), choosing a secretive society of British nobles, who worship the Archon Hod (Ties to Power). This formalized group began as a gentlemen's club during the Victorian Era (History), pledging themselves to preserving the aristocracy (Agenda). Its founding fathers were wealthy industrialists, landowners, and military men (Leadership). Over time, the organization established gentlemen clubs in New York, Paris, Hong Kong, and Bombay, attracting hundreds of new members (Membership). Due to the group's extensive wealth and military contacts, its membership wield *substantial* power and influence in society (Combat/Influence). The group's intimate connection to the Hod and his followers provide them with *respectable* occult power, as well (Magic).

THE VIRTUS CLUB

Type: Group

Purpose: Control

Ties to Powers: Archon Hod

Agenda: Maintain the power and influence of the British Aristocracy, as well as create new 'pure' bloodlines.

Membership: Hundreds of elite members, living across the former British Empire. They assemble in gentleman clubs owned by the group.

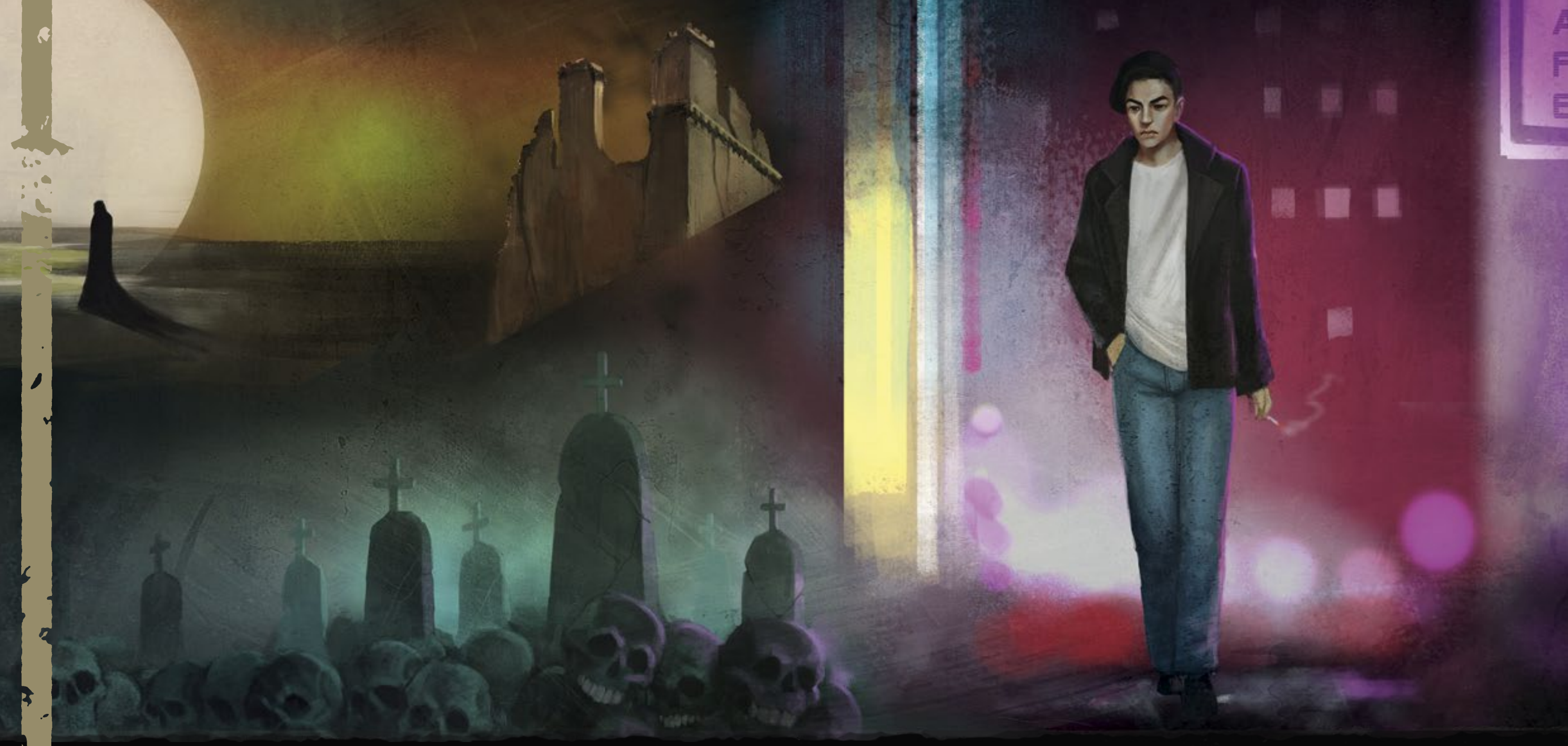
Leadership: Descendants of the Founding Fathers, the Royal Family, and other "aristocracies"

Attributes: Combat [3]; Influence [3]; Magic [2]

Moves: Cover up crimes, Slander others in media, Seize someone's assets, Access military hardware, Have someone roughed up, Summon reinforcements, Prognosticate future trends, Mentally dominate others

History: Fearing the British Empire's collapse, the founders pooled their resources to create the Virtus Club. After the two World Wars, they established themselves throughout England, Europe, and Asia. Even with the Empire's decline, they retain political and financial influence across the Commonwealth.

Description: Drive by the Principle Honor, The Virtus Club believes in Manifest Destiny and maintaining their god-given right to rule the world. They believe the British Empire was undone by its lessers and the mixing of the races. The wish to rebuild that which has been lost, crushing the financial futures of those colonies that slipped free from British control. They also wish to undermine the upstart nations that threaten their country's blessed sovereignty. As such, their members operate globally, all belonging to significant political and financial institutions. The clubs are meeting places, as well as recruitment centers. Useful individuals are brought under their control through bribery, slander, and blackmail, as well as magical domination, when necessary. However, their core membership remains entirely devoted to the founders' vision and are chosen solely through bloodlines.



CHAPTER 4

PILLARS OF THE FALSE HEAVEN

ONE AFTER THE OTHER, EVONNE AND HENRY SQUEEZED BEHIND THE false wall, disappearing into the darkness beyond. Saxon slipped through next, letting the security gate slide back down. Their flashlights sparked to life, revealing grey concrete and cracked brick; the underground mall's storefronts shuttered and covered in graffiti. Mildewed furniture, boxes, and stacks of paper formed islands of detritus, casting long shadows in their lights. Vague footprints disturbed the dusty floor, leading off into the gloom.

"You're sure about this?" Saxon said. Evonne replied, "My street friend calls this place The Halls That Move. Perfect setting for our next webcast." Saxon nodded reluctantly. Urban adventure, be damned. He simply wanted this trip over with.

They followed the footprints, winding their way across the arcade. Leading the way, Henry went around another pile of garbage, briefly disappearing from view. When Saxon shone his light, he'd gone, as if he'd never been. "Henry?" he said, stepping forward. Nothing. He turned to where Evonne should have been, but his light found only emptiness. Not even the footprints remained. He was truly alone.

OVERVIEW

Although compelling stories revolve around characters, many times one of the most important characters is forgotten – the setting. More than simple backdrops, locations help define the conversation, affecting it through their distinct personalities and qualities. Ranging from single rooms to sprawling metroplexes, the story's setting establishes the narrative milieu, continually influencing the PCs on many levels. As such, locations are as significant to the conversation as the NPCs and Intrigue Map. This is doubly important in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, as the dichotomy between our perceived world and reality fundamentally influences every aspect of the fiction. The setting itself intrudes on the PCs' lives, both changing them and being altered by them, in turn. Additionally, setting locations can be treated as threats or relationships – known as places on the Intrigue Map. Throughout this chapter, the two terms are used synonymously.

ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost,*** the GM acts as the players' conduit to their spatial surroundings, presenting their world to them through the conversation. More than that, she also relay the setting's underlying nature and untold stories, infusing them with context and history. As such, when developing and presenting their world, the GM should be consciously aware of the setting's narrative, also known as *environmental storytelling*. This technique helps the GM establish that the location existed long before the PCs arrived, adding to its inherent realism.

Overall, environmental storytelling can be broken into three distinct, yet interconnected, levels: **Narrative**, **Setting**, and **World Design**. These levels directly influence the whole setting, adding different aspects to the game's specific locations and overall world design. They also reflect the story's themes, revealing the underlying story in their own fashion. By incorporating these concepts and qualities, the GM can create an immersive gaming experience, adding a certain honesty to the world, and further connecting the players to the story. As they explore the setting and its background, the PCs also learn more about themselves and their place in it.

Writing on the Walls

Narrative is the highest level of environmental storytelling, reflecting the story's themes, emotions, and identity. As with the *mise-en-scène* of film and literature, each established detail adds significance and history to the space, making it more realistic for the players. Through the conversation, the GM infuses the setting with these various elements, and encourages the players to collaboratively share in the experience. Their beliefs and perceptions help strengthen the location's description, creating stories of their own to fill the space. Indeed, this organic process may provide the GM with new and unexpected narratives to expand upon. The players become invested in the space, wishing to explore its background and mysteries. Finally, these narrative elements allow the GM to infuse the space with emotional resonance, including dread, thus adding additional tension.

When developing a location, the GM should divide each significant location into *theme*, *emotion*, and *identity*. Each concept can be defined through brief one-word descriptions; whatever the GM needs to trigger their imagination. Building upon these three concepts, she weaves narrative elements into the overall description, while also taking inspiration from the players. In turn, these important places begin forming the story's aesthetics and atmosphere, as discussed in ***Dark Undercurrents*** (p. 109). This also helps establish the appearance and purpose of each location/place, as discussed in ***Fear's Architecture*** (p. 111).

THEME

A core tenet of environmental storytelling is theme. Each place's theme reflects its intrinsic meaning and essence, revealing its personal narrative. The GM weaves various thematic aspects into its description, evoking an intimate response for the characters as they explore it.

While these themes can supplement the scenario's overarching narrative, they can also remain entirely location-specific – thus creating an intimate story onto itself. This becomes important when locations are established hubs on the Intrigue Map. As before, the players can contribute to and expand these thematic concepts through their interactions with the space. The GM can incorporate themes listed in ***Chapter Two*** (p. 46) or generate their own; thus, accenting their individual narratives.

- **Homestead (Nationalism/Segregation)**: The immaculate homestead reflects the owner's deep love of country, culture, and societal privilege. Their home represents their last bastion in this world falling prey to globalism and immigration.
- **Abandoned factory (Nostalgia)**: The brutish iron-works appears permanently stuck in another time, its monastic architecture reflecting the city's bygone era of prosperity. Despite its age, the building remains virtually untouched by urban decay.
- **Rooftop steakhouse (Security in Community)**: The hole-in-the-wall steakhouse serves as the sanctuary for the community's eclectic and fashionable members. Artists, poets, writers, dilettantes, and socialites gather on the rooftop to share food and ideas in safe company.
- **Dystopian arcade (Embrace Escapism)**: Located in an underground shopping center, this thematic arcade embraces the cyberpunk rebellion. Patrons wander its maze of neon and faux-rust architecture, playing retro video games and seeking solace away from the outside world's banality.
- **Fitness center (Appearance versus Reality)**: Housed inside a converted warehouse, the gym features the latest fitness equipment and facilities. Mirrors line every surface, yet everyone's reflection appears attractive and vibrant – no matter their health.
- **Cat Street (Everything Can Be Bought)**: Once a collection of family businesses, the open-air mall fell on hard times. Now, independent shops and dining options serve less savory clientele, allowing them to operate away from prying eyes.

EMOTION

The other tenant of environmental storytelling is *emotion*. This represents the location's inner nature and how PCs emotionally respond to it. By incorporating narrative elements, the GM can inspire psychological reactions within the PCs, as well as their players. She may also invoke evolving emotional responses, which can play heavily into the *tension-release cycle*. For example, the GM features a narrow, dangerous space that becomes increasingly dark and suffocating, increasing player tension as the PCs move forward. Finally, the passage progresses into an open and well-lit area – representing a sense of triumph and relief. The GM can utilize similar progressions to represent various emotional transformations.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the PCs' emotional states directly affect locations, especially those attuned to similar Influences. As emotional resonances become more pronounced, they actually warp the location, guiding it toward the Influence's dominating realm. As such, the GM should be conscious of both the location's connection to the Higher Powers and the PCs' emotional state.

- **Homestead** (Fear): Despite its pleasant outward appearance, the homestead feels uninviting and hostile, reflecting the owner's xenophobic attitudes and his desire to keep the world out. Visitors find themselves uncomfortable at best.
- **Abandoned factory** (Regret): Once the community's shining hope, the factory now represents their failures and regrets. The solemn edifice resonates with the shattered dreams of its former workers.
- **Rooftop steakhouse** (Inspiration): The restaurant reflects its imaginative and enthusiastic community, featuring art, music, and the constant fervor of creativity.
- **Dystopian arcade** (Rebellion): The arcade's continuous music and game noises inspire iconoclastic tendencies, intensifying the farther one goes into the labyrinthine building.
- **Fitness center** (Arrogance/ Desire): Anyone entering the building is filled with an overwhelming sense of pride. In time, the person feels intense self-love, even narcissism, desiring only to perfect themselves more.
- **Cat Street** (Greed): This unsavory part of town inspires greed, filling people with the need to haggle for the best price. Everything is about gaining wealth and power.

IDENTITY

Environmental storytelling is relayed through *identity*. As with *mise-en-scène*, these visual identifiers provide contextual representations of the underlying narrative. Each one should reveal and/or inspire the location's story. In essence, if the themes and emotions cannot be recognized through these signifiers, they're lost and pointless. They represent the ambience and history of the location, revealing past conflicts and establishing importance to the storytelling elements. These signifiers help the GM develop and flesh out more specific locational details,

More subtly, the Influences affecting the location are established through this level of storytelling. The GM can be subtle or overt when presenting these narrative elements. Furthermore, the GM may wish to describe different elements that manifest when the Illusion weakens or shatters entirely. As discussed above, if their emotions or passions go out of control, the PCs themselves may invite physical changes to the location.

- **The Homestead**: White-picket fence, locked gate, bars over windows, perfectly mowed yard, crisp flags, politically incorrect signs, conservative placards from past elections, trim painted in national colors.
- **Abandoned Factory**: Old timecards, cold furnaces, piles of soiled work clothing, lockers with children's drawings and pictures, moldering accounting books, smashed Employee of Month trophy case.
- **Rooftop steakhouse**: Vibrant paper lanterns swaying in breeze, boutique chic furniture painted in modern colors, polished wooden bar with neon sign declaring 'A Thing Of Beauty Is A Joy Forever,' wall paintings and murals from local artists, raised stage for impromptu jam sessions, constant scent of barbecued meat.
- **Dystopian arcade**: Maze-like tunnels, neon lights, gang graffiti, artfully defaced propaganda posters, rusty pipes and metal staircase, retro video games, glittering pachinko machines, video monitors playing 80s action movies, futuristic snack bar, provocative dioramas of future city.
- **Fitness Center**: Intense ceiling-lights, garishly painted ceiling beams, complex fitness machines, jock jams on the sound system, people constantly shouting and grunting with effort, unseasonably warm and musky air, mirrors on every surface, amorous encounters in the locker rooms.
- **Cat Street**: Central 'park area' with faux grass and dried up water feature, taco stand with plastic chairs and rusty tables, curio shop stacked with rows of gaudy trinkets and electronics, pharmacy featuring unusual remedies, old vending machines filled with bizarre items, cheap boutique featuring knockoff clothing, feral cats warming themselves in sun.

Location	Theme	Emotion	Identity
The Homestead	*Nationalism/Segregation*	*Fear*	*White-picket fence*
			Locked gate
			Bars over windows
			Immaculately mowed yard
			Crisp flags
			Politically incorrect signs
			Conservative placards from past elections
			Trim painted in national colors
Abandoned Factory	*Nostalgia*	*Regret*	*Old time cards*
			Cold furnaces
			Piles of work clothing
			Locker with children's' drawings
			Moldering accounting books
			Smashed Employee of Month Trophy
Rooftop Steakhouse	*Security in Community*	*Inspiration*	*Vibrant paper lanterns swaying in breeze Boutique chic furniture painted in modern colors Polished wooden bar with neon sign declaring 'Beauty above all else'*
			Wall paintings and murals from local artists
			Raised stage for impromptu jam-sessions
			Constant scent of barbecued meat
etc	*etc*	*etc*	*etc*
etc	*etc*	*etc*	*etc*

Dark Undercurrents

Despite their shared universe, each ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** game should feel unique to the players. By firmly establishing the setting, the GM can personalize her vision of the ***KULT*** mythos and individualize the ambience/atmosphere of her game. Also, this further encourages the players to emotionally identify with their surroundings, and evolve from being passive listeners into active participants in the collaborative process. Thus, the world becomes their shared space to explore and experience.

In short, setting should help answer the questions of *what happened before* and *what is happening now*? These questions can be answered by accentuating three levels of interaction: *World*, *Surrounding*, and *Internal*. These conceptual levels are discussed below, including examples for the different atmospheres outlined in *Book Two*.

WORLDS BEYOND US

Despite our beliefs, we do not exist within our personal microcosmos. There are entire worlds beyond us, billions of lives progressing without our interaction and knowledge. However, humanity invariably affects us on some personal level, intruding upon our existence culturally and socially. Through their actions (or inaction), these exterior forces directly and indirectly alter how we go through our daily life. Despite our best efforts, we're inevitably constrained and defined by the world we live in.

The GM can incorporate these exterior forces to further establish the setting, reflecting the ambience through distant events. Although they may not directly encroach on PCs personal experiences, they'll thematically remind the player of the world the characters exist in. In turn, these occurrences affect and challenge their personal beliefs and perceptions. For example, if the GM wishes to invoke an ambience of *cosmic horror*, she can introduce worldly elements that inspire feelings of helplessness and insignificance. Similarly, if she wish to invoke an ambience of *psychological horror*, she can introduce elements that reflect pervasive trauma and violence, both mental and physical.

- **World (Existential Dread)**: Another restaurant is found empty, as if the staff and patrons vanished mid-dinner service. The word *Eynhallow* is found written on the women's bathroom mirror. These mass disappearances events continue happening in different countries.
- **World (Body Horror)**: Grainy footage emerges from the strange riot. Images show hulking figures loping through the burning night. Their fleshy bodies are naked, amalgamations of limbs and mouths, tearing into one another.
- **World (Extreme Horror)**: A prominent political figure dies in a traffic accident. A male body is discovered in the trunk; naked, tied and gagged, he shows signs of prolonged torture.
- **World (Surreal Horror)**: The night skies flood with swirling eddies of green and violet for several days. Scientists blame the phenomena on solar flares, but refuse to comment on the moon's disappearance.
- **World (Traumatic Horror)**: *The Cherished* website allows people to upload images and notes from their deceased loved ones onto shared digital *memento mori*-like profiles. Soon, the profiles begin editing themselves, revealing terrible secrets and horrific sins.

WORLDS AROUND US

Frequently, we are defined by the **worlds around us**, the people and places we encounter in our daily surroundings. At home, we share our lives with intimates and strangers alike, depending on them for our daily existence. We fulfill familial demands, handle occupational responsibilities, and assume predetermined roles, yet we might never truly understand the people we love and trust. Our neighborhoods are miniature worlds onto themselves, rife with preconceptions and paranoias, where alliances and feuds play out with false smiles. At work, we must navigate cultural and social politics, struggling with petty jealousies and dangerous rivalries. Every day, we traverse our communities, shop and dine at stores and restaurants, walk through parks and playgrounds, and savor the city's other delights. Soon, we recognize what streets are safe and those to avoid. We embrace those we can trust and shun those who might pose a threat, real or imagined.

The GM can (and should!) infuse the setting with these details, altering the PCs' world perceptions through their daily experiences. This level of environmental storytelling is more immediate and intimate, narratively influencing the characters, and directly affecting their lives. These elements continuously appear within the conversation and fiction, shaping the setting and its presentation. As such, it makes it easier for the GM to introduce atmospheric and thematic concepts. For example, if the GM wishes to invoke *loss of innocence*, she can describe missing person posters in the PC's favorite eatery. If she wish to create an aura of paranoia, she can describe the setting in hostile and suspicious terms.

- **Surrounding (Existential Dread)**: After suffering a brain lesion, your partner becomes literally fearless. She's increasingly excited and curious about the 'monsters' she's seeing around her.
- **Surrounding (Body Horror)**: No one else notices how your father's eyes change, no longer his own. You might ignore it too, if you hadn't seen the thing squirming beneath his beer belly, pushing against the soft skin.
- **Surrounding (Extreme Horror)**: Your friend's child is discovered in the woods behind their home, the body mutilated from neck to groin. Oddly, the police refuse to help, accusing them of making the story up, as they never had a child to begin with.
- **Surrounding (Surreal Horror)**: The attic trunk contains things beyond words, too alien to understand and remember. You were told to never open it. But you were a child and didn't know better.
- **Surrounding (Traumatic Horror)**: As you watch, your friend begins to cut her own wrists, only enough to wound. She claims the bleeding is the only way to "cure herself". Of what? Herself, of course.

WORLDS WITHIN US

No matter where we live, we cannot escape the worlds within us. Defined by our experiences and memories, we perceive and reimagine our environments, interlacing their existence with our established beliefs. Indeed, what is truth and what we *believe* to be truth can be wholly separate concepts. Similarly, our preconceptions can alter how we perceive new environments, clouding our judgment with emotional responses, such as fear.

Reflecting this in settings can be challenging for GMs, but internalized perceptions of the world rest at the narrative core of *KULT: Divinity Lost*. Each PC's – and their player's – emotional and mental connections to the setting can directly affect them and even alter the setting itself. As such, the GM should also incorporate descriptions that reflect the PC's personal biases and beliefs. This becomes increasingly important when introducing atmospheric and thematic concepts that narratively parallel the PC's emotional and mental state. For example, if the GM wishes to play upon the PC's *traumatic* childhood, she could invoke the sense of claustrophobia and intimidation. If she want to reflect themes of body horror, she can focus on the PC's perceptions of corporeality and the flesh.

- **Internal (Existential Dread)**: At the networking dinner, everyone's laughing at the vile jokes and insults. When you don't, they begin watching you like an intruder. You're not one of them. This isn't your world.
- **Internal (Body Horror)**: Instinctively, you lash out with your hand. There's a scream and splash of wet crimson. You see black iron claws retracting under your nails, blood dripping from your fingers.
- **Internal (Extreme Horror)**: Fingers play across your belly, igniting pleasures as they drift lower. Spectral lips caress your shoulder and neck, reaching your ear. Something whispers lovingly, in a scorched and harsh voice: "Be my offering."
- **Internal (Surreal Horror)**: You hear the typing, click-clack, forever in your head. A sadist is writing your world. Making you suffer. This isn't going to end well.
- **Internal (Traumatic Horror)**: Your son looks at you from the inside the mirror. "I'm sorry, papa. They want me to go with them." The image fades. You are alone again. You can't even be sure he was there this time.

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

As with NPCs, the GM should only define them enough to establish believability. *KULT: Divinity Lost* remains a collaborative storytelling experience, so, in effect, less is more. While it's tempting to develop every minute detail, this amount of work is unnecessary, and potentially limiting for the shared narrative. Strive to create compelling locations/places, but do not spend excessive amounts of effort and time in the process. As long as the location possesses narrative credibility, the players will mentally fill in the unspoken details.

The qualities present in *Fear's Architecture* (p. 111) are provided for inspiration only; they are not a checklist that must be fully realized. Complete them or leave them blank as needed. Allow for changes and new perspectives, feeding off the players' contributions and insights. Similarly, if an inconsequential place becomes important to the players, feel free to expand upon it and make it unique to your setting. The world is yours; do as thou wilt.

- **Unity Tower**: The brutish tenement features an abundance of open-air spaces and natural greenery. Vibrant flower boxes adorn each balcony, filling the air with heady perfumes.
- **Divine Pastries**: The small pie shop appears pristine and well-tended. Its whitewashed interior and chrome fixtures gleam brightly during the day. A display case is filled with desserts. An odd smell of smoke lingers under the sugary sweet scents.
- **Mayfair Walkway**: The canal walk stretches through the city's lower section. Much of its length has become overgrown; park benches and seats swallowed up by nature. Narrow paths lead down to the lazy waters, thick with water lilies and bird life.
- **Tomlan House**: Hidden behind tall hedges, the grand estate squats amongst decaying gardens. Its dirty windows are dark and brooding; the front porch stretches out like a toad's mouth, waiting patiently.
- **Tartarus**: Built inside an old textile plant, the nightclub stretches out in every direction. Booths and tables ring the enormous dance floor, while several bars line the walls. Neon lights crawl over the darkened interior, undulating like flowing water. Tormented faces have been painted on the walls and floor.

Fear's Architecture

Through world building, the GM begins defining each place's general appearance and aspects, as well as their overall function and purpose. Be they narrative backdrop or established threat, the GM should infuse these important locations with realism and significance. Complimenting narrative storytelling, this form of environmental design further ties the place to the story and its overall progression. As such, the GM should consider three levels of reality places simultaneously exist within: the *environmental*, the *social*, and the *spiritual*.

From these levels, they can fully establish the location's various aspects and qualities, such as appearance, function, and purpose – breathing life into game setting. In turn, as these qualities are described, the players can then incorporate their own personal experiences and knowledge to orient themselves within the narrative space, as well as inspire them to contribute to its overall inception. However, the GM should only incorporate as much information as she requires to create narrative credibility (see sidebar).

WHAT LIES ABOVE

Firstly, the GM needs to define the setting's prominent environmental qualities, such as architecture, decoration, furniture, layout, and general condition/state. For larger locations, the GM should also consider its general surroundings, including topography, flora and fauna, human structures, and weather. Places are characters onto themselves, each possessing its own unique appearance and ambience. By employing all five senses, the GM can fully establish the location's credibility and importance in the players' minds.

Furthermore, these qualities directly contribute to the place's environmental storytelling, revealing its underlying identity, nature, and purpose, as discussed above. The location's unique narrative and thematic qualities are also reflected in this manner. By considering the location's outward appearance, the GM and players can begin visualizing its internal workings.

WHAT LIES WITHIN

Secondly, the GM should consider the setting's societal qualities, such as culture, history, population, and socioeconomics. Most locations are inhabited by NPCs, who use the space in some form or fashion – be it living, play, or work. Their distinct characteristics and habits alter the location's function and purpose, as well as affecting its architecture and construction. Heavily urbanized locations can develop vertically, rising into skyscrapers or descending into underground structures. Less populous areas may expand outward for privacy or inward to maintain their sense of community. Culturally sensitive societies may favor historical and religious landmarks over modernization. Less prosperous communities may reappropriate abandoned locations and local resources for new purposes.

In addition to revealing the location's outward appearance, these societal qualities also help define the NPCs in these locations. Entire cultures and histories may rise and fall within the same location. Even the smallest house may witness generations of dwellers, each leaving their distinctive mark upon its appearance, form, and function. The GM can reflect these in narrative, helping to reveal the location and its associated NPCs combined. This brings true life to the place, providing it an intimate connection with humanity – and the players, in turn.

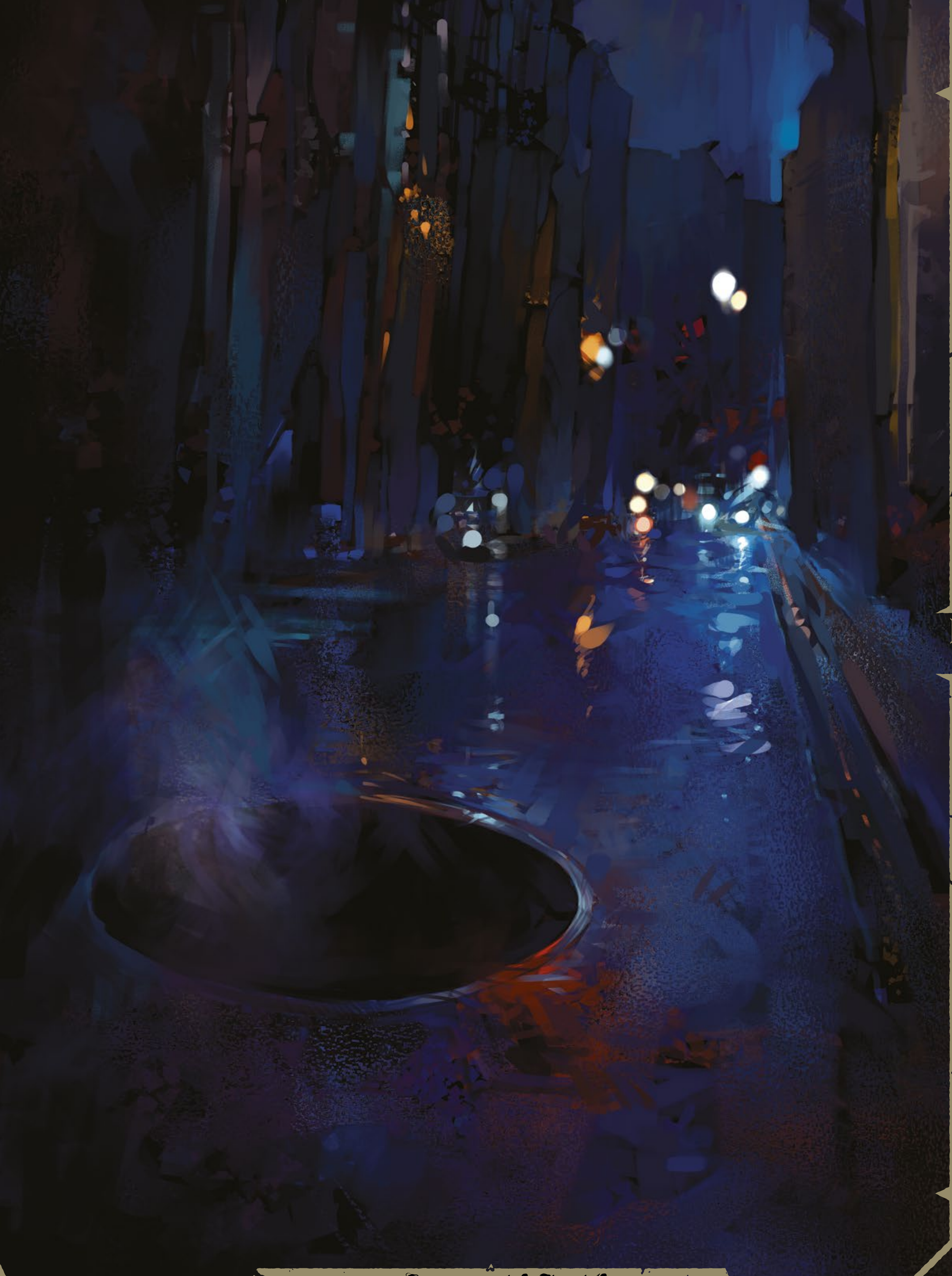
- **Shotgun Shack**: Thanks to its stubborn owner, the one room house has survived nature and time. Lawn chairs sit in front of the brightly painted home, usually occupied by one or more of the neighbors. Hundreds of photos line its interior; faces of an entire community, who've come and gone over the years.
- **The Penitent Smile**: Graffiti artists have transformed the railway tunnel's entrance into a leering grin. Locals visit the painted mouth, calling their secrets into the dark void. People believe that the Burnt Man waits deep inside, offering forgiveness to the worthy. All attempts to permanently close the tunnel have failed.
- **Museum of Broken Things**: Situated under the mall, the museum is open daily to the public. The owner is a man of indeterminate age, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of the city. People bring damaged items here; broken toys, torn books, ripped clothing, etc. All were destroyed during local tragedies.
- **The Monument**: The patinated statue stands at the park's far end. Unmarked, most have forgotten who it depicts. Veterans from different wars spend their days here, playing chess and checkers on the marble tables. They leave game pieces to commemorate their fallen friends at the statue's feet.
- **The Owl's Nest**: The English gastropub attracts the city's New Agers, where they can meet and talk about religion and theology freely. Symbology from various different faiths decorate the quaint interior. Local occultists host weekly seminars, and folk bands play every weekend.

WHAT LIES BELOW

Finally, the GM needs to consider the setting's spiritual qualities, even if they never appear physically. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, every location has an underlying existence, be it Metropolis, Inferno, or another Realm. At any given moment, the Illusion can be shattered through the PCs' actions, revealing the True Reality. This can play into the conversation, as the GM can utilize her Holds to represent these barriers falling. As such, the GM needs to be continually aware of the place's dark reflection and prepared to present it.

Most locations have some connection to the Higher Powers, as well as their associated geography in Metropolis or Inferno. However, many Realms, entities, and Forgotten Gods can also influence and manifest in specific locales. The GM can connect these otherworldly realms directly to PCs and NPCs, incorporating places from their traumatic lives and fractured psyches. These supernatural connections only need some internal logic, even if the players never fully understand them.

- [Limbo] The bedroom is a wonderland of abstract art, surreal paint, and modern fixtures. At night, its dreamlike angles and colors shift and swirl.
- [Gaia] Across from the burned out school, the overgrown playground has devolved into nests of weeds and choking vines. Its equipment and furniture are crumbling, as the area slips farther into Gaia's Borderland.
- [Inferno] Outwardly, the peaceful kindergarten classroom appears innocent and welcoming. But upon closer look, children's pictures take dark undertones, paint peels in the corners, and low moaning echoes at night. In truth, the room hides the former teacher's purgatory, where they're perpetually tortured for their hideous crimes.
- [Labyrinth] At the edge of town, the deserted junkyard remains an eyesore of discarded things. Its maze-like scrap piles shift and change each night, serving as a gateway to the Labyrinth.
- [Metropolis] Built in the 1950s, the avant-garde theater has become popular amongst the college crowd. While it features foreign and independent movies, some grindhouse presentations imagery reveal Tipareth's Citadel, slowly corrupting the movie-goers.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

All three levels of environmental storytelling can be combined to establish detailed locations. As they become permanent fixtures on the Intrigue Map, the GM can use these different qualities to further outline the location/place, as she see fit. From this narrative world-building, she can continually expand important plot points, associated factions, and major NPCs. The following details can help the GM frame these important places for easier reference. These serve as examples only, and do not need to be completed in full – particularly, if the location isn't significant to the story itself.

Name: The place's name can be its actual honorific or an informal identifier, such as a nickname.

Overview: A brief summary of the place.

Archetype: The place's general archetype.

State: The place's current condition when the PCs discover and/or interact with the space. Note: This may change during the story.

Description: A detailed description of the place and its appearance, including any qualities that aren't immediately evident.

History: The place's background and events relevant to the current narrative.

Influences: Any Influences currently affecting the place, such as Higher Powers or the Realms. Depending on the place's nature, several Influences may be in conflict or working together.

Qualities: Any significant environmental storytelling qualities, such as theme, emotions, and story identifiers.

Threats: Ideas for possible threats the GM can utilize the space for, be it as part of the story and/or the GM Moves. These threats generally revolve around themes specific to the location.

Unique Moves: Any GM Moves unique to the place, which may be used during the conversation. This includes potential GM Moves/Hold acquired from failed Ability rolls, such as Prepared.

Additional Notes: Any aspects and/or factors that should be considered when describing the place, such as time period, weather, and NPCs/Monsters present. Any contributions provided by the players should be included here, as well, such as personal history and Relations.

Also, places are more than mere collections of descriptors and thematic qualities. They represent the interconnected locales where the main story and character arcs progress. Many can become – and continue to be – vital to the PCs, narratively entwining with their present, past, and possible futures. Others may serve as sanctuaries and respites, while others serve as repeated backdrops for character interactions and exploration. Much like NPCs, places are ever changing and evolving, reacting to the PCs and their actions. The GM can enhance the conversation and the fiction by accentuating the narrative significance in different ways.

THE PLACE WHERE FICTION AND ACTION MEET

When designing scenarios, the GM should include interesting places to enhance the narrative. By introducing cinematic set-pieces, they enhance the fiction and expand the campaign's setting. As the PCs explore the narrative space, it may become increasingly important to the players. They'll remember the tension they experienced there, deepening their involvement and sense of agency. Significant locations can become key hubs on the Intrigue Map, generating excitement and fear when the PCs must return there.

Furthermore, the GM should infuse the setting's fiction throughout the conversation itself. Places represent three-dimensional spaces, each providing narrative opportunities to explore. During action sequences, inventive players can – and should – use these spaces to their advantage, weaving them into their PC Moves. In turn, the GM can incorporate the space's fiction into the GM Moves, generating challenges and threats to be overcome. Combined, this creates player investment and interest, enhancing their roleplaying experience.

- A sequestered helipad atop the lictor's high-rise apartment, guarded by mundane and supernatural forces.
- An automated lighthouse located upon the man-made island. It still contains its pre-war furnishings from when keepers resided there.
- A hospital being closed due to budget cuts. Several sections were left exposed to the elements, and are now in complete disarray.
- A remote home/research facility built into the landscape. Serves as the home of an eccentric medical doctor, who never leaves the building.
- An underground cistern meant to catch flood waters. Constantly humid and cold, its vast spaces are wreathed in fog and darkness.

Cause and Effect

As with NPCs, places are not static plot points; they continually evolve as the story progresses. The GM should be consciously aware of how the PCs' actions affect the narrative space, which may have long-lasting repercussions. When PCs interact with locations, the GM can consider the three factors discussed for NPC Reactions (p. 64). By sustaining the setting's dynamic nature, they make it more realistic and responsive for the players, deepening their involvement in the story.

- The PCs break into the used bookstore to retrieve the ritual tome they need. A week later, they notice that the shop remains closed. Its front door is wrapped in police tape.
- The PCs inadvertently allow the antagonist (hub: Monster) to continue tormenting the runaways, who squat inside the old gymnasium. As time progresses, the building shifts closer to Inferno, as the Illusion frays under their repeated traumas.

- The PCs drive local gang members off their farmstead, where they've been cooking drugs. Within weeks, the gang's competitors take over the farmstead and resume business.
- The PCs kill the lictor dominating the local church congregation. Freed from its corruptive influence, the parishioners embrace more tolerant beliefs and help the community.
- The PCs break through subterranean barriers and wards while searching for an artifact. Much later, they discover Children of the Underworld are utilizing this new route to kidnap surface dwellers.

Nowhere is Safe

When designing places, the GM shouldn't rely on descriptions of dissolution and decay. As terrifying as unlit alleys and shuttered factories may be, true dread lurks behind pristine facades and whitepicket fences. All places are touched by the Illusion, and nowhere is immune to its insidious influence. ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** focuses on personal horror, where traumas, betrayals, and twisted passions fester and linger, waiting for a singular push to set them free. Undermine the player's sense of security and make their homes and workplaces foreign and frightening. Peel back the mundane facades to reveal the supernatural horrors waiting beneath. Places are where the GM can introduce site-specific threats, such as GM Moves drawn from the PCs' Dark Secrets and Disadvantages.

- A low mewing comes from the cubical across from you. As you watch, pale, dirty fingers wrap around the top of the partition.
- The cashier's face sags like wet clay, dripping thick clumps onto your purchases. "Paper or plastic," they mutter through sagging lips.
- The antiseptic stink hurts your eyes and nose, compounding the hall's sterile whiteness. You can barely see for the brightness, but sense something shambling out of the distant doorway.
- Cherry blossoms fall in a lazy rain, coloring the pond's surface in stark beauty. The green waters ripple as deformed koi swim around in lazy circles, feeding off algae-wreathed skulls.
- Beyond the bus windows, the idyllic neighborhood slowly devolves into an apocalyptic nightmare. Opulent houses crumble into smoldering husks, where hunched figures rummage through the debris. "Last stop," the driver chirps over the speakers, as the vehicle shudders to an uneasy halt.

WHAT REMAINS BEHIND

After death, our final emotions and regrets can linger on, and even intensify to unnatural limits. Their intensity thins the Illusion and leaves behind connections to the realm the unfortunate is condemned to. These areas are prone to strange phenomena and unnatural emotions, particularly those associated with the trapped soul. Time and Space can warp, forcing people to relive and reenact the tragic past. Some souls may even attack the living, cursing them for the simple act of being alive. The GM should consider what emotional silt remains in significant locations, waiting to be stirred up by the PCs and their personal traumas.

- The neighborhood boxing gym has seen its share of tragedy, including the death of its previous owner – beaten to death in the ring. Fights and sparring matches frequently get out of hand. Pure rage resonates here, as the building has become entwined with the Death Angel Hareb-Serap.
- On certain nights, tenants hear tortured pleas echo in the common garden. Many years ago, they ignored cries for help, listening as one of their neighbors was brutally murdered. The victim's helplessness and torment fractured the Illusion, constantly replaying the moment in the public space.
- The basement den feels perpetually cold, no matter how high the heater goes. An aura of guilt and loss clings to everything like soap scum. After their recurring argument, the former owner dared her depressive husband to finally make good on his promise to kill himself. To her horror and regret, he did.
- No one goes near the carousel anymore. The serial killer collected his victims here, murdering them in the tiny maintenance room. Now, the carousel can take its riders to the infernal realms of Gamichicoth.
- The main bedroom remains much as it was decades ago, lovingly tended over by the deceased's son. His enduring devotion and intense grief have weakened the Illusion. Now, the room touches Binah's Citadel; the scent of incense and sounds of gentle chanting drifting through.

Fear in the Familiar

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, PCs are frequently exposed to completely exotic worlds, be they the horrors of Inferno or the surreal wonders of Limbo. However, these fantastical realms can become so alien that the players lose any sense of normalcy and their place within the narrative space. As a result, the location loses its authenticity and credibility, which diminishes its emotional resonance, i.e., the place loses its aura of fear.

As such, the GM should incorporate familiar qualities within the place, so the players recognize what they are experiencing. Emphasizing mundane elements helps narratively ground the players and make the location more convincing, even if it is completely inhuman and horrifying. When the familiar and fantastical are indistinguishable, the place resonates credibility, making the players' experience far more unsettling, as they instinctively understand their role within the space.

- The glistening wall parts, revealing an open space beyond its pulsing flesh. A short row of blinking buttons rests on the opposite wall, much like an elevator. Meat and metal rumble in anticipation of you entering the confined room.

- Rows of glass tanks line the concrete hallway, each filled with swirling protoplasmic soup. Tubing and pipes rise from the floor, feeding the malformed things floating inside. At the base of each unit, visitors have written descriptions of their perfect child.
- Ruddy feelers crawl over the bar's interior, forming a grotesque jungle of polluted weeds. Skeletal remains silently sit at the booths, frozen in time; the fungal growths woven through their bones. The jukebox remains untouched, glowing in the shadows, as it plays some nostalgic tune.
- The stony path ends, opening onto a tangled thicket. The diseased trees loom over you, scratching at the sunlight with their dead limbs. Trash clings to their branches like dried skin, rustling in the breeze. A colorful mosaic of broken glass circles the roots.
- A black sun can be seen through the muddy sunroof. Dust clings to every surface, turning the walls and floor ashen. The dining room table has been set perfectly, untouched by time or decay. Every utensil glimmers in the eerie not-sunlight.

LOCATION ARCHETYPES

Places can be as intriguing and interactive as any NPC, possessing distinct personalities and qualities. Depending on their narrative purpose, most locations fall under quintessential Archetypes. These compliment the story in familiar and recognized ways, and represent the broad spectrum of places commonly featured in horror stories. Each can easily be introduced into the conversation and personalized to enhance the fiction. As before, these Archetypes serve only as *suggested* foundations for the GM to build and expand upon, and should not confine her creative process.

Refuges

Refuges represent communal places, where the PCs can enjoy their *moments* of respite from the story's challenges and threats. Best suited for extended games, refuges are developed through collaborative storytelling, usually during the group's first session. They can also be discovered during the story's natural progression. In either case, the players and the GM all contribute to the refuge's overall description and narrative qualities. As part of the campaign's fiction, it can also become intimately tied to the PCs' story arcs, effectively serving as another Relation.

Firstly, the group determines where the refuge is located. The place can be public or private property, such as the PCs' favorite bar/restaurant, university lounge/library, corporate office/boardroom, secluded cabin/park, or the PCs' home/workplace. Next, they provide its general description and layout, as well as any specific qualities and resources This includes defining its shared history and how each character relates to it. Does one of them own the location? Does it have a specific name and/or moniker? Why did they choose this place as their refuge?

Secondly, the group outlines the refuge's unique qualities. Ask each player to describe one distinctive feature that makes the location special. These could include its particular location, the people who work there, aspects of its appearance, unusual resources or attributes, or other odd quirks. The other players can contribute to these elements, incorporating their own ideas.

Thirdly, determine if the refuge is connected to the character's Advantages, providing them with additional benefits – even bonuses on rolls. For example, their refuge could contain one PC's ***Occult Library***, as well as resources for another PC to effectively use ***Data Retrieval***. These – and future – benefits are considered nonrestrictive, as long as this fits into the fiction. Commonsense should be used when choosing these aspects, rather than min-maxing the location. Refuges are meant to promote roleplaying between the players, rather than boost their PCs' abilities. Also, any roll bonuses are only accessible *on-site* and must be approved by the GM.

The players chose *The Veteran's* dojo as their communal refuge. They knew each other during the War; a nurse, photographer, and soldier. After returning home, the PCs sustained their familial bond, meeting here to train and relax. During *The Scientist's* (nurse) part-time work here, she amassed considerable medical supplies (**+1** to ***Battlefield Medicine*** rolls). *The Artist* (photographer) decorative touch provides the building with a meditative aesthetic (**+1** to ***Enhanced Awareness*** rolls). When needed, *The Veteran* (soldier) can call upon some of his trusted patrons to help out in a fight.

Structures

From the first megalithic temples to multimillion-dollar city apartments, humanity's reliance upon **structures** has persisted throughout the ages. Cast out from Metropolis, we desperately needed to create new sanctuaries to keep the lurking terrors at bay. Soon, our simple walls of mud and sticks grew into opulent towers of glass and steel. Our unconscious desire to rebuild Metropolis resonates in modern architecture; glittering skyscrapers mimicking the Archons' Citadels and subterranean vaults digging down toward the Abyss. Small or vast, we've filled these places with our memories and trinkets, hoarding them like treasures.

Rich or poor, sanctuary or derelict, residential complexes are cities unto themselves, where entire societies remain separated from the world outside. In penthouse suites, blood splashes over marble tiles, warm bodies writhe on silken sheets, and the *nouveau riche* embrace unspeakable oaths to retrain their wealth. In crumbling tenement buildings, inhabitants try to shut out cries of people they can't help, vagrants sleep in filthy stairwells, and desperation dwells behind every rusting door.

Homes collect every trauma and pain inflicted within their dominion. Pain, regret, and sin coalesce in their concrete and wood, layers of travesty and trauma collecting like sediment, waiting until something disturbs them. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the traditional 'haunted house' represents places where the Illusion has thinned under this psychic weight. The bathroom mirror reflects a suicide's purgatory. Things nest behind the stucco walls, sneaking out at night to consume the sleeper's dreams. A troubled teen's computer taps into the Dark Net – even though their home lacks an Internet connection.

Manufacturing plants vomit out shoddy goods and services to feed the hungry masses. Factories grind and rumble tirelessly; their belts, gear, and forges are but humble reflections of the Machine City's grandeur. Warehouses and distribution centers serve as sacred cathedrals to commerce and greed. Department and big box stores are sprawling labyrinths of shelving and temptations, bathed in nauseating fluorescent lights and oily shadows. Meat hangs in industrial freezers and wet markets, its shape unnaturally *familiar*. Gated storage facilities hide away countless sins behind each orange door. Air-conditioned server farms and telecommunication centers touch on Tiphareth's Citadel and Limbo, summoning horrors through wires and fiber optics.

Public buildings are integrally connected to the Illusion, usually overseen by angels, lictors, and other devotees to the Archons. They embody the Principles they represent, ceaselessly influencing, suppressing, and twisting the people within their hallowed walls. In hospitals, the infirm and sick surrender themselves into the hands of strangers. Some disappear into hidden operating galleries. At universities and schools, our children's minds are tested and twisted, molded into bourgeois compliance or recruited for dark purposes. Civic and government offices impose the Archons' wills upon their populations, forcing them into eternal servitude.

Countless structures have succumbed to urban decay. Abandoned, their neglected facades molder and crumble, undone by nature and human hands. In these forgotten places, the Illusion thins until they border on Metropolis and other realms. Residential parks grow wild, their hollow shells stripped bare by vagabonds. Forsaken homes wait at the end of abandoned streets, eagerly welcoming the foolish into darkness.

Structures are not limited to buildings. Large vessels, such as ships and trains, fall under this archetype as well. Cargo ships ply the oceans, while trains cross the country on ribbons of rusted steel. Underground constructions wait beneath our cities, such as crypts, metro stations, and sewer tunnels.

- The Cold War bomb shelter has been long forgotten by the mental hospital's administration. Drawn by She Who Waits Below, patients and staff descend into its winding corridors and rooms, where they offer tributes to her.
- Wind blows through the unfinished building, stirring the plastic sheeting walls. Bare metal beams rise toward the open sky, where angry clouds threaten rain. A dozen angels perch on the exposed girders, their beatific faces staring upward, ruined maws gaped open.
- The night club's pounding beat drives its patrons to bacchanal excess. Bodies press in on you, trying to pull you deeper into the crowd. In the pulsing lights, their faces appear smoothed over, featureless. It'd be so easy to join them in pleasurable obscurity.
- Flanked by grey tenements, the shining bus terminal rises like an island of modernization. Riders wait in silence, staring blankly at the LCD screens that ramble off banal news and pop culture trivia.
- Babbage Telecom's imposing headquarters dominate the desolate industrial park. A metallic forest of antennae and satellite dishes sprout from its roof. Blackened windows obscure its massive interior. No employees arrive or leave, regardless of the time of day.

- Located in a two-story home, the tiny bookstore has served the community for as long as anyone can remember. Its stock heavily leans toward horror and science fiction, but it also offers New Age books and supplies. The female owner appears ageless, and is well-versed in the occult.
- Beneath an unused off-ramp, the motel offers sanctuary to the desperate and lost. Surprisingly clean and maintained, it serves as the final respite before the road merges with the highways of Metropolis.
- Stacks of shipping containers rest beside the disused train siding. Vagrants have transfigured them into a vibrant shantytown, huddling around their fires and metallic homes. Arcane graffiti covers each container, serving as protective wards and establishing ownership.

ROOMS

Rooms are the repositories for our dreams, hopes, and fears. They are where we live, work, and rest, storing our belongings and memories. Within their walls, we fight, rejoice, make love, and hide from the outside world. Yet, no matter how cramped or spacious, impersonal or intimate, every room belongs to the Illusion. As such, they are infected and tainted by trauma, passions, and unsavory desires. They remember our every hidden sin and forbidden longing. In time, these psychic stains thin the Illusion until true horrors bleed through, meshing with our own. Every room becomes a world onto its own, populated with infinite terrors.

From the dusty attic to the dank cellar, our homes are filled with nightmares. Traumatized children hide in closets, opening gateways to Inferno and the Underworld. Bedrooms become the domains of Passion and Limbo, inviting wonderous excesses and fevered dreams. Shadows and secrets fill our garages, our horrific acts hidden behind boxes and bags of old clothes. Inside utility rooms, decayed things crouch behind the furnace, softly breathing in the dark.

Workplaces are complex and hostile environments, rife with petty politics and soulless regulations. Patriarchal boardrooms invite Binah's and Thaumiel's influences alike, their grandiose confines turned oppressive and stifling. Unspoken sins taints the break room, seeping into those who socialize there. Traversing the cubicle farm in the right direction allows the traveler to enter the Labyrinth. At night, the northernmost office gazes out onto Kether's Citadel. Deep below, the boiler room's ductwork leads to Machine City.

As with structures, GMs needn't be constrained by the traditional concepts of 'rooms.' Any confined space can fall under this archetype, such as vehicles, tool sheds, camp tents, and elevators. These include urban spaces like phone booths, ATM kiosks, and public restrooms, which may seem safe, but hold unnatural threats. Once the Illusion shatters, physics and logic lose their power over rooms, allowing for intriguing possibilities.

- The locked storeroom remains continually free of dust and clutter. Every new moon, strange trinkets from Metropolis' haunted bazaars appear on its shelves. Sometimes, the room takes something – or someone – in exchange.
- A greasy sheen clings to the shower room's mosaic tiles and chrome fixtures. An oily stink lurks under the musky air. Hidden behind the farthest mirror, an empty space stretches out. A humid breeze rises up from far below, carrying the sounds of distant machinery.
- Your child sits on their bed, their adorable head turned away from you. Something about the bedroom seems strange. The toys are older and unfamiliar, stained with age. Then your child calls to you… from downstairs.
- Despite the heat outside, hoarfrost clings to the garage's every surface. Brutal cold emanates from the pickup truck, resting on the raised car lift. Frozen corpses continue servicing the vehicle, dutiful even in death.
- Light filters into the attic study through the semi-circle window. It stretches across the wooden floor, illuminating scrawled pages positioned in tidy rows. Their ink glistens, as if freshly written.
- The building's water tank houses an ancient entity. Knowledgeable tenants sacrifice living creatures to the stagnant depths in exchange for gifts. Diving deeper leads the brave and unwary to Metropolis's sewers.
- You hear the kiosk's door lock behind you. Its fluorescent bulbs begin sparking, and then going dim, one by one. Only the ATM's sickly green light remains. Beyond the glass windows, the city has disappeared – leaving only a vast darkness, pressing in upon your compact world.

THE SPIDER HOLE

Overview: Haunted crawlspace

Archetype: Room

State: Silent and Sterile

Description: Hidden behind some boxes or furniture, the ruddy cupboard door leads to an empty crawlspace. The unlit cubbyhole is cramped and narrow, but long enough for a grown man to stretch out. An odd scent of fresh loam lingers in the small space, but there are no signs of damp or mildew. On rare occasions, an indistinct rustle of distant voices can be heard. When the door is closed, the darkness is absolute. In the farthest corner, someone has crudely carved into the wood: Non Gratus Anus Rodentum (Not Worth a Rat's Ass).

History: A former tenant/owner served a Tunnel Rat during the Vietnam War, assigned to gather intelligence and eliminate the Viêt Công within their subterranean complexes. The harrowing experiences deep inside the earth traumatized him, leaving deep emotional scars. However, the longer he remained underground, the safer he felt. Upon returning home, he found himself called back to the primal darkness – hiding away from the world within the crawlspace. His mental traumas frayed the Illusion, eventually connecting the space to the Borderlands. Deep within Gaia's earthen bosom, he mentally and physically devolved into primordial darkness. His family eventually believed he wandered off and/or committed suicide.

Influences: Gaia, Hareb-Serap (Minor)

Qualities: Quiet, Dark, Sanctuary, Primal, Womb, Pursuit, Escape, Regression

Threats: Breakdown Civilization (Regression), Conflict (Dissolution), Isolation (Avoidance)

- **Breakdown Civilization**: Gaia's corruptive influence permeates throughout the space. As PCs progress deeper, any type of technology, ranging from electronics to modern clothing, begins to crumble and dissolve. Prolonged exposure begins regressing their mental facilities to primitive states.
- **Conflict**: The PCs become entrenched in an armed conflict, where both sides are feral with primal rage. Usually, these pitched battles are between former American soldiers and Viêt Công troops, reduced to using crude melee weapons.
- **Isolation**: A child disappears into the cupboard, believing it's Narnia and wishing to escape her parent's separation and arguing.

Unique Moves

Temperature/humidity increases dramatically

Hanoi Hanna's voice echoes in the distance

Roots dangle from the roof like rotted fingers

Deformed bats, rodents, spiders, ants

U-bend flooded with rank water

Antipersonnel trap

Roof collapse

Suburbia

After World War 2, the surviving generations fled the cities to the suburbs, expanding them exponentially. They followed promises of polite societies and affordable housing. In America, people embraced the idealized peace of white-picket fences, all white neighbors, and manicured lawns. In England and Europe, elegant tower blocks, town houses, and structured communities promoted harmony with easily accessible public services. These genteel neighborhoods and communities seemed the perfect escape from the concrete nightmares of urban existence. Yet, as suburbanites escaped their old fears, they soon discovered new terrors awaited them.

The themes of *suburban gothic* dwells amongst the peaceful houses, narrow streets, and isolated cul-de-sacs. In gated communities, housing associations and neighborhood watches wield unfettered power, inflicting insult, torture, and even murder on those who refuse to conform to 'proper' society. Xenophobia and envy twist the human heart, soon exploding into violence between neighbors. Gossip and slander pass over painted lips, every dirty secret bartered like currency.

When night falls over this beatified world, masked killers emerge to hunt hapless babysitters and rebellious teens. Bored college dropouts and frustrated husbands stalk the alleys and parks, searching for greater thrills and relishing cruel misdeeds. Shared creepypastas hold more truth than one might expect, where fears of cultists and dark rituals in the parks aren't merely fun digital campfire stories. Behind tranquil façades, tempers turn to violence against family members, and passions ignite into betrayal and carnal acts.

- The Sundown Murders shock the community, inspiring fear and mistrust as the summer stretches on. As brutalized bodies are discovered, many inhabitants lock their doors and arm themselves, while others hunt the streets to exact vengeance against the so-called Phantom.
- Each weekend, local teenagers congregate around the park amphitheater, known as the Pines. As the night progresses, they satisfy their passions, losing themselves in booze, drugs, and sex. On special evenings, primal things emerge from the trees to join their festivities.
- The Ladies' Association assures the neighborhood maintains its respectability, puritan attitudes, and proper image. They fine offenders and take radical steps against people who just won't conform. Several families simply disappeared, apparently transitioned to other communities.
- The affluent family living next door is respected in the community, prominently attending every local function. No one speaks out against them, ignoring the strange smells, late night comings-and-goings, and pained cries coming from their rear garage.
- No matter how many alleys and streets the PCs turn down, they always return to the single, dark house on the cul-de-sac. Faceless children watch them from the upstair's windows. The front door hangs open, only shadows beyond its threshold.

- Purple ribbons begin appearing in the neighborhood, wrapped around trees, lampposts, and fences. Neighbors claim the ribbons signify the household's devotion to the Red Duke. The ribbons means it will bypass their home on Culling Night.
- The ground vibrates, as if something immense is stirring beneath your feet. As it intensifies, you hear the distant shriek of a train whistle. You attribute the low thrum to the approaching train. At least until you remember they'd closed those tracks months ago.
- An estranged wife shoots her husband as he walks up the driveway. She sits on the lawn, numbly eating pieces from his wounds. Inside the house, the television flickers with blurry images from his affair. An indistinct, metallic voice repeats two words: "Do it."

DISTURBIA

Suburbia serves as the buffer between urban centers and rural wilderness. Sometimes, boundaries are blurred and these outside worlds encroach upon its relative safety. These divergent realms are where *disturbia* rules.

From within, the city impinges on paradisal suburbs, giving rise to strip malls, manufacturers, and business parks. Poor city planning and gentrification produce areas of increased crime and abject poverty. Litter-choked brownfield lands echo their former industries, the soil still contaminated with chemical waste and neglect.

From without, the wilderness waits beyond the backyard fence with its untended green fields, tangled woodlands, and abandoned farmsteads. Coyotes and stray dogs prowl the peaceful streets, joined by wolvens and impossible creatures. Children play in empty lots and half-constructed housing projects. Behind the tangled stand of shrub, there's the old house *everyone* swears is haunted.

- Despite its practicality, people avoid the country road leading to the community at night. Crimson eyes watch from the tree line, reflecting the lights of passing cars. Last year, someone broke down and their vehicle was discovered empty, splattered in blood.
- In the brownfield, only the weed-cracked foundations of the industrial complex remain. Occasionally, the air shimmers and contorts in unsettling patterns. Geometric stone constructs are seen floating in the moonlight.
- A farmer's field touches the mall's parking lot, forming a living wall. The high grass ripples like an ocean of gold, moving against the wind, whispering in restless anticipation. Children dare one another to step off the asphalt, yet no one takes the bait.
- Everyone knows that the Raggedy Man lives at the local dump. His hovel resembles a shrine, built from recycled trash, bottles, and cans. He knows secret pathways and can guarantee that anything given to him will disappear forever.
- An ugly fence wreathed with razor-wire surrounds the forested area. Not even the bravest teen ventures onto the private property. Everyone knows that the unseen hospital facility holds dangerous mental patients, and that they frequently stalk the grounds. No one talks about the doctors.

Rural

Away from the city's concrete towers, beyond suburbia's faux-utopian communities, the modern world surrenders to pastoral fields and picturesque townships. The allure of slow days and rustic traditions calls to those eager to escape the stresses of modern life. In these rural sanctuaries, time stands still. Those born here rarely change, remaining loyal to their cherished ways. Clannish and wary, the rural folk place community and family above all else. Intimately connected to the sensual and harsh natural order, they devote themselves to its continual cycles. This relationship isn't simply one of convenience, but based on mutual survival, learned and ingrained over generations, shaping their morality and faith.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, rural settings draw upon the primal themes of *folk horror*, including physical and social isolation, distorted and suppressed belief systems, paranormal violence, and mistrust of the outside world. Despite his destruction, the Archon Chesed's influence remains deeply ingrained amongst rural communities, its folk traditions upheld throughout countless generations. In small towns, old gods discover new worshippers, rewarding their devotion and sacrifice with fertility and prosperity. Meanwhile, the primal forces of Gaia wait at the field's edge, eager to tear down Elysium's borders.

Beyond the peaceful farmsteads, humanity's greed and desire to tame the natural world have left deep scars on the land. Logging and mining towns emerge and fester like boils, while mining roads and pipelines slash through the despoiled wilderness. Illegal landfills and dumping grounds sit outside small towns, slowly filling with poisonous corruption. Through these unnatural wounds, the Death Angel Nahemoth seeps in like an infection, tainting and mutating our world.

Isolated backroads allow drifters, outsiders, and pariahs to form hidden communities, where they share and practice their divergent philosophies. Neopagans and other religious groups seek small towns and rural spaces to escape prying eyes. In communal seclusion, activists and extremists plot their crusades to free society from the degenerates and tyrants. Authorities clean up the gruesome remains from the road sides, honoring archaic pacts to keep their towns safe from ancestral terrors.

- Choked with vines and undergrowth, Corson's Crossing fell into disuse ages ago. Yet, locals claim phantom trains still run along its rusted tracks, rattling the concrete pilings as they carry prisoners to faraway internment camps. Infernal conductors gladly add trespassers to their human cargo.
- A weathered gate stands behind the gas station, marking the disused attraction. Beyond it, the Wounded Path stretches up into the tangle of trees and brush. Painfully cheerful signs document the massacres that took place here, offering disturbingly detailed accounts at each vantage point.

- Farmers know the Deer Woman is more than myth and leave her offerings of milk and honey each evening. In return, their animals and crops remain bountiful and healthy. Every few years, someone forgets their sacred duty and is dragged away in the night.
- Despite some modern accoutrements, the village remains firmly devoted to its puritan roots. Anyone breaking the scriptures are taken to the Bleeding Trees for punishment, enduring torture and maiming. Ignorance of these laws offers no protection to outsiders.
- Behind the motel, tucked under an elm tree, the familial cemetery remains well-tended. Dating back centuries, each gravestone is decorated by a dog's skull crowned in wildflowers.
- The hayfields and surrounding area have fallen under Gaia's influence. Every rock, tree, and blade of grass possess malevolent souls and cruel intent. Humans in the affected region rapidly lose their intelligence and self-control, transforming into primitive beasts.
- Within moments, the storm descends over the vehicle, turning everything beyond its windows dark with torrential rain. Yet, there is no sound, no wind, only smothering silence, as if the torrent has washed the world away.
- The small clearing has been hacked from the forest. Stacks of wood are piled beside crudely built tables. Pots, knives, and other gear rest against three large metallic tubs. Within each, copper pipes coil through still-living bodies, distilling their essence down into glass jugs.

BACKWOODS HORROR

Long before *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deliverance*, the backwoods frequently appeared in gothic fiction, where lonely taverns and family farms hid vicious cannibals, inbred monsters, and sexual predators. One needed only take the wrong dirt road to fall prey to torture and depravity. Today, the backwoods remain as popular as ever in horror, both fiction and cinema. This is the land of the 'other,' where civilization collapses upon itself, giving itself over to baser needs and desires.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, country lanes and biking paths can lead unlucky travelers into other realms. Quaint villages may actually be forsaken sections of Metropolis, where degenerate humans and freakish races have lived together for generations. Members of these communities have spawned local legends, such as werewolves, Sasquatch, and the Jersey Devil. Cobbled roads lead to ancient battlefields, which have succumbed to Inferno's influence. Crumbling cabins serve as personal purgatories, hiding hungry ghosts eager to share their pain. Shrines to pagan deities are tucked away in abandoned bunkhouses and forlorn fire towers. In these wild hinterlands, the Illusion offers little protection, and its rules hold no meaning. These are the borderlands of Gaia, where the true wilderness begins, devolving into primeval chaos.

- No one knows how old the burned, hollow tree actually is, but everyone knows that *Broken* Bones lives inside it. When the entity is summoned to avenge some misdeed, another human-faced stone soon joins the circle surrounding its cursed home.
- The off-season hotel once served skiers and outdoorsmen before falling onto hard times. Its owner stubbornly continues fighting the inevitable, even as the building succumbs to disrepair. He turns a blind eye to his patron's nefarious activities, as long as they pay upfront.
- The First Family kidnap suitable breeders from the local area, imprisoning them in the underground maze beneath their plantation. Victims are used in a vain attempt to cleanse the Family's impure bloodline, enduring endless torments until they're too weak and eventually discarded.
- The rancher carries on the ancient tradition of maintaining the northern fence-line. A dozen polished skulls are stacked in his wheelbarrow, ready to be planted beneath each new fencepost. Only then will the Whistlers remain silent.
- A firelight glows in the night, casting the forest in profane yellows and oranges. No matter how long you head toward its wavering flames, it remains elusive and distant, drawing you deeper into the unhallowed woods.

THE OLD MADE NEW

Rural horror remains firmly entrenched in the collective psyche, featuring heavily in horror literature and cinema. While so many delicious terrors can be found in these settings, the GM must remember to treat the subject matter with its due respect. Do not transform your stories into hackneyed clichés of foolish deviancy, bucktoothed inbreeding, and idiot rustics. Cast off the tired narratives of haunted cabins and incestuous serial killers stalking campgrounds. Turn these stories on their heads and introduce fresh perspectives into the genre. Even the humblest town offers microcosms of beauty, grandeur, and unique characters. Reveal the mundane world first, embracing its normalcy and safety. This makes the darkness all the worse when it's finally exposed.

ELYSIUM'S HIGHWAYS

Connecting our cities and lives, arteries of asphalt and gravel stretch through the countryside and wilderness. Within our cocoons of steel and rubber, we become anonymous entities searching for the next horizon. Cars and trucks blur by ceaselessly, like metallic termites emerging from an upturned mound. The droning hum of tires and disturbed air becomes hypnotic, lulling us with its continual rhythm of movement and purpose. Yet, even here, horrors can be found.

The lonely truck stop serves as an oasis of anonymity, where people disappear by design or malice. A roadside attraction offers both delights and terrors for those drawn in by its gaudy signs. Jackals stalk empty stretches of road, waiting to be picked up by some Good Samaritan. Meat meant for ancient creatures sways in freezer trucks; the frosty shapes far too human. At forgotten crossroads, the God of Highways offers its poisoned gifts to travelers. The impromptu shortcut leads to Metropolis's hidden byways.

- In the bus's rear, the unsettling man murmurs warnings about this being 'monster territory.' People ignore him until the sun sets and the lonely terrain changes, morphing into something hostile and unfamiliar.
- Your tires are ruined, punctured in a dozen places by the nailed board. A half dozen boards still sit on the lonely road you came down. They aren't there by accident. Someone put them there. You hear a truck's engine coming toward you.
- As you crest the hill, the hunched figure comes into sight again. Oily hair covers his pocked face, but you know it's the same man. His scabrous hand goes out, raising his deformed thumb. He's been following you for days now.
- The culvert behind the rest stop stinks of filth and decaying meat. Dozens of bodies molder in the choked drain, their flesh violated and torn. Deeper in, metallic heat rises from an impossible depth.
- The highway suddenly ends, dropping off into raging flood waters. Some travelers haven't been quick enough to stop. Now their mangled vehicles collect like flotsam on the river's muddy bank. When you look, the road behind you no longer exists.

IN TRANSIT

Generally, *KULT: Divinity Lost* stories are divided into sections, much like book chapters. This allows for story transitions as the PCs travel from one location to another, where the GM doesn't need to describe the trip in-between. For narrative ease, the PCs travel by some means, such as car, train, airplane, or boat, and the conversation resumes as they reach their destination. However, if the GM has spare Holds and/or the PCs employ certain Advantages, such as ***Wayfinder***, they can add interesting interruptions and/or detours along the way. Depending on allowable time, these side trips may become complete stories onto themselves, helping to break up the main narrative.

Wilderness

Don't go into the woods. Even in today's modern world, vast wildernesses remain just beyond the edge of town. We're both fascinated and terrified by this primal realm. We hear nature's call in our troubled souls, offering purification and simplicity in its unsullied pace. The smell of pine resin and loam unconsciously remind us of our previous existence, when we were at one with the natural world, rather than in conflict with it. Now, we've forsaken the wilderness for steel and concrete jungles, and forgotten our place within its endless cycles.

Beyond the trappings of humanity, our hubris and indignation can kill as quickly as exposure and starvation. In our arrogance, we enter the wilderness unprepared and are laid low by its numerous threats. We take unfounded risks in an indifferent realm, where twisted ankles or infected cuts condemned us to agonizing death. And, in these lands of primordial fears, Gaia still rules. The living earth forever hungers for our flesh and souls.

The remote realms of *wilderness horror* are vast and varied, offering isolated settings in every guise. In deserts, our bleached bones disappear beneath the shifting sands. Between sheer mountains and impassable forests, valleys unspoiled by humanity reflect Gaia's greatest wonders and darkest terrors. In jungles, the green hell eagerly tears down our homes and bodies with its elemental might, only held back with bulldozers and flames. The boundless oceans mirror Metropolis' Primal Sea, swallowing up ships and planes; their countless islands and infinite depths remain unexplored. In the Arctic and Antarctic, vast stretches of shifting ice and snow erase our existence in moments. Frozen tundras and bottomless swamps have stunted humanity's encroachment with killing cold and bug-infested wasteland. We remain forever separated from these natural worlds, no matter our desire to be at peace with them.

- Drownings plague the idyllic lake, claiming swimmers and fisherman every year. Even the hardiest outdoors person doesn't camp near its peaceful shores for long. Many claim the victims can be seen beneath the crystalline waters, reaching up, beckoning for others to join them.
- Beyond the resort's marked pathways, the jungle loses its allure and becomes something primeval and dangerous. After a few steps, the thick ferns and impenetrable canopy quickly confuse and disorientate tourists. In moments, you're hopelessly lost – swallowed up by the Green Hell.
- The biting sun crisps your skin, parches your lips. Around you, sand swells and sinks like golden waves, shapeless and fluid as the ocean. A darkness stands on the distant dune, its shape blurred by the shimmering heat. It drops to all fours and disappears from sight. Yet, you still feel its gaze upon you.
- Scraps of bloodied fabric and tarp lay scattered around the campsite. Everything manmade has been smashed beyond recognition. Charred bones smolder in the fire pit, too big to be an animal's. But there are no signs that this was an animal attack, not even a single track.
- Around the river's bend, the shoreline becomes littered with natural and structural debris. The forest itself blackens, as once-majestic trees slump over like crushed reeds. Ash coats everything, turning the vernal wonderland into grey desolation.
- The path ends abruptly. A shear wall of stone rises upward and away in both directions. Broken bones litter the rocks and scrub, amidst torn clothing and shattered camping equipment. The cliff shivers, rumbling deep within. Dozens of eyes open up in the granite, followed by slitted mouths.
- You'd never notice the island if not for waves breaking against its shores. Low and virtually featureless, the floating world soon fills your horizon. Plastic trash and flotsam collect in dissolving heaps, brushing against the boat's hull. Clumps of flesh, hair, and bone are fused together in an embryonic mass, feeding its countless orifices of this human pollution.
- Silence dwells here, all normal sounds of wildlife absent. The thickets of heavy brush recede, revealing an unnatural clearing. Every surface is covered in red moss, scarlet feelers blanketing the forest floor and dead fall. Beneath the living mass, vague shapes pulse and quiver.
- Black clouds of mosquitoes swirl over the lichen-encrusted rocks and spongy permafrost. As you watch, the masses join together, gaining substance and shape. The bunched form staggers toward you, reaching out with limbs made of squirming insects. A gaping hole forms its mouth, crying out in an incessant buzz.

CABIN IN THE WOODS

Humanity continual pushes back the wild, carving private retreats into nature's bosom. We build resorts and hotels in the middle of nowhere, pretending to be one with nature. Logging camps and makeshift hunting lodges dot the forests, while secluded ranger towers watch for forest fires. People go 'off-the-grid' to escape the rigors of city life, only to realize they've entered an unforgiving and hostile world.

An amalgamation of the structure and wilderness archetype, the *cabin in the woods* has become a recurring trope in horror. Time and time again, these man made sanctuaries are besieged by terrible forces from outside or birth nameless horrors inside. Within these secluded microcosms, a cornucopia of personal horrors can be explored. GMs shouldn't be afraid to forego the standard plot-lines and dig deeper, playing on the dichotomy between humanity and nature. The cabin in the woods offers the perfect setting to explore the themes of isolation, paranoia, and identity.

KULT: Divinity Lost also offers narrative flexibility through the many Realms, such as Gaia, Madness, and Time and Space. The GM can create an alternative version of the *cabin in the woods* archetype by meshing incongruous settings together. Fueled by fear, isolation, and physical exertion, traumas can open rifts through the Illusion, incorporating memories and moments from the PCs' lives into the wilderness setting. Suddenly, their familial home appears in the woods, while an underground tunnel infuses itself with a natural cave system. These man made spaces invade the natural world, offering unique narrative opportunities.

- The ranger tower stands upon the hill like an alien tripod. An emerald radiance brightens its windows from within, circling like a lighthouse's lantern. As you approach, the light pauses, illuminating the forest around you. *It knows you're here.*
- The scrub and dry grass have been cleared away, revealing hard clay and dust. Twin trap doors emerge from the ground, marked with strange symbols. Chains are looped through its handles to keep it shut. Yet, the padlock appears to have rusted through.
- Having seen better years, the mobile home still stands against nature's relentless attacks. Inside, several metal cots and modest furniture served its former inhabitants. A tin of photographs shows the cabin before it was abandoned. Somehow, you're in several shots.
- The fishing hut sits along the lake shore, waiting for the ice to return. Yet, smoke rises from its chimney. Through the door, you see the potbelly stove's orange glow, revealing the wooden interior – and the impossible hallway beyond it, stretching off.
- Flowers and ornaments adorn the cabin's lawn. The building is something out of a fairytale, painted in garish colors. You can't see beyond its windows, each blocked by pastel curtains. The air smells of gingerbread and sweets, making your head swim with its aroma.

IN METROPOLIS'S SHADOW

From Hong Kong to London, Lagos to New York, every human city is a pale reflection of Metropolis, the Original City. Of all places, few locations are more significant to the ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** mythos. Both sanctuary and prison, cities can become integral to any campaign and scenario. Much of the conversation will revolve around the PCs exploring and interacting with their city's unique features. As such, metropolises become more than mere narrative backdrops; they are complex NPCs with compelling facets and quirks.

The greater the GM's familiarity with the City's aspects, the easier it becomes to effectively portray it during the conversation. They'll know its concrete landscape through established buildings and locations, as well as expanding its hidden foundations and Realms. They'll also know the people who populate its different districts and businesses, each contributing their personalities to the city's identity.

However, as discussed in ***Establishing Credibility*** (p. 111), the GM does not need to detail the city's every barrio, building, and street. She only need to make the setting believable for the players, and allow the city's different aspects to develop over time. The following information is for inspiration only; it is not a checklist to be completed prior to running the game.

The Living City

As with living characters, cities evolve according to their environment, relationships, and social demographics. In particular, cities are defined by their cultures and history, which can differ tremendously depending on where they're situated in the world. Even the weather itself can alter the city's ambience and growth, as well as its infrastructural needs. These dynamic factors resonate throughout its architecture and geography, as well as the people living within its urban confines. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, there are supernatural considerations as well, as High Powers influence the living city from beyond. Furthermore, these various aspects are interconnected, affecting one another in both subtle and profound ways.

Living cities are architectural constructs shaped by their demographics, geographic location, history, resources, and topography. These aspects directly affect their overall appearance and development, which are reflected in their distinct ambience and architecture. Indeed, many modern cities are specifically recognized for these physical qualities, such as Amsterdam, Quebec City, Istanbul, and San Francisco. The GM should take these factors into consideration when describing the city, be it fictional or based on real-life settings.

The elements discussed below can be reflected both thematically and narratively. As they explore the city, the PCs will recognize its inner workings and development. They'll know what areas to visit and which to avoid, and where to find people with things they need. Similarly, the GM can infuse these underlying issues into their narratives, reflecting the urban growth and decay through NPCs, places, and organizations. As these elements are woven into the fiction, the conversation becomes more real. They can intrude on the story, forcing the players to make different narrative choices. They may also provide the GM intriguing Moves, specific to that city and/or region. Indeed, whether developing an established or imaginary city, the GM should consider these various features, as the setting itself can potentially enhance or limit their narratives.

Physical Location

First and foremost, cities are specifically defined by their initial terrain, which help or hinder their architecture, development, and expansion. Cities constructed in mountainous terrain differ from those built in deserts, jungles, islands, or open plains. Large physical locations encourage outward expansion, whereas limited areas prompt cramped, elevated construction. Regions with firm bedrock allow towering skyscrapers, but poor foundations limit tall structures height; e.g., Paris is hindered by its complex network of catacombs. Coastal cities may have deep waters, allowing for heavy industry and expansive ports. Harsh terrains may require outside resources or unique architectural solutions. The city's location may directly affect many of the cultural and economic elements discussed below.

Similarly, local weather can directly contribute to the city's appearance. Some cities create vast undergrounds to avoid harsh climates, yet others lack any subsurface structures due to hazardous conditions. Coastal and river cities may have constructed intricate waterways for transportation and/or flood reduction. Low lying cities may suffer from air pollution, while higher elevations endure severe weather. Arid climates may require specialized architecture to reduce damage from dust storms and high winds. Temperate regions allow vast green spaces and parks, while drier regions may require aqueducts and reservoirs to preserve water. The GM can incorporate these environmental elements into the story, narratively reflecting them through Threats and city-oriented Moves. For example, the PCs may find themselves trapped by flash flood waters filling an underpass they need to cross.

SENSE IN THE CITY

Cities are vibrant worlds that assail and delight all the senses in equal measure. When describing its locations, the GM should incorporate every sense to create an intricate tapestry of experiences. These various sights, smells, and sensations can also reflect different areas and times of day or night. Is the air choked with garage stink or rich with spicy foods? Does the climate feel comfortably cool or oppressively hot? Does the city ever get quiet or is it perpetually noisy? Does the city exhibit vibrant colors or is it perpetually drab and grey? Allow the players to experience their city through different perspectives, firmly establishing its existence in their minds.

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL DETAILS

Living cities are directly influenced by their histories, both local and world events. Significant moments resonate throughout their cultural and social evolution. Some of these events are felt for generations, continuously defining the city's personality and population. These historical differences make each city unique and reveal stark contrasts. These distinctions are particularly noticeable between various countries. For example, some Eurasian *buildings* are older than North American *cities*. Yet, even relatively young metropolises can have intriguing backgrounds for the GM and players to explore.

As such, whether she uses an imaginary or real city, the GM should know its most important historical events. What were the city's defining moments, be they triumph or tragedies? Did the city endure significant hardships, such as conflicts and natural/manmade disasters? Were there cultural or social changes that affected the city, such as immigration, economic downturns, political unrest, or technological advances? How have these events shaped the city and its inhabitants? The GM should also consider the Higher Powers have influenced the city's history and progress.

These historical events directly affect the city's cultural and sociopolitical features, further defining the customs endemic to the region. Some cities are melting pots, amalgamating and blending numerous traditions and philosophies together. Others remain discrete patchworks, where different groups remain within their culture-specific districts – by choice or circumstance. In turn, these concepts and ideals shape the city's architecture and formation, as well as its personality and language. There may be several languages and local expressions, greetings, and slang unique to each city. There may be specific celebrations and holidays honoring the city's long history – or inglorious past.

People do not simply reside in their homes and offices. They celebrate, eat, mourn, travel, and relax, changing their urban landscape to serve their needs. The city's diversity is reflected in its bars, restaurants, and local gathering spots, such as art galleries, coffeeshops, and music shops. Parks and museums offer respites from the city's hectic pace, where anyone can go to sit down and admire the beauty around them. These areas further define each city district by establishing cultural and social borders. Entire worlds can coexist unto themselves, separated by mere blocks. Many inhabitants may never venture outside their comfort zones; be it out of fear or ignorance.

One vital, yet frequently unspoken, aspect of historical culture are the city's places of worship. Different cultures congregate around buildings devoted to the Divine – and frequently exclude those not of their faith. As such, religious buildings reflect each community's cultural diversity and social status. Furthermore, due to the Higher Powers' intimate connections with religion, the GM can use this to determine what Principle may influence the neighborhood's inhabitants.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Cities are defined by their names. Indeed, many resonate in the global consciousness by name alone. If set in an existing city, the GM should write this down first – otherwise, develop it together. Cities are named after virtues, prominent geographical features, their founders, or even sister cities. Make sure whatever you decide fits the tone of your game. Also, consider what the residents call their home. For example, New Orleans is also called, "The Crescent City," "The Big Easy," and "The City That Care Forgot." This will add to your fiction, and the general ambience. The GM may also flip this narrative convention and use the *nameless city* archetype, adding an aura of ambiguity and soullessness to their setting.

ECONOMICS

Cities feed upon the region's economic strength to survive and thrive. In many cases, they initially develop around specific commercial and industrial centers, which attract and support their population. Soon, smaller employers spring up to answer the population's various needs, allowing the city to grow and prosper. This codependent relationship further defines the city's architectural and cultural existence, as these businesses attract workers from different educational and social backgrounds. As such, the GM should know the city's main employers and/or manufacturers, as these factors will be reflected in the setting itself. For example, governmental cities, such as Washington DC, are far different in appearance and cultural qualities than one built upon heavy industry, such as Essen, Germany.

Furthermore, if the core industries fail, the city's entire economic system can potentially collapse. Citizens are forced to adapt and attract new business opportunities. Without commerce and trade to sustain it, the city can fall into decline, losing both wealth and population. Urban blight takes root, slowly rotting the metropolis from within. Those unwilling or unable to move away become stuck in the dying city. Crime intensifies as people grow desperate. Frustration and violence spreads as the populace falls into despair. Many foment anger and resentment against those who betrayed and abandoned them. Under this strain, the Illusion cracks, drawing their once-grand city closer to Metropolis and/or Inferno.

DISTRICTS

Cities are inherently vast and varied locations, usually far beyond the scope of most stories. Due to this, the GM can become overwhelmed trying to detail their urban setting. For ease, they can break the city down into smaller, more intimate chunks known as **Districts**. These neighborhoods are separated by both physical, socioeconomic, and cultural boundaries. They can further establish atmospheric and narrative concepts, such as *emotion*, *identity*, and *theme*. This lends credibility to the specific District, while not overwhelming the GM (and players) with extraneous details about the entire City.

As the conversation progresses, the GM can then work inward, further dividing the District into **Locations**, i.e., significant regions in the district. These, in turn, can be divided into **Places of Interest** to the story itself, such as houses, stores, parks, industries, restaurants, etc. In this way, the GM can break the District into more manageable pieces, so they never lose their narrative focus. Over time, they can add additional Places of Interest, slowly fleshing out the District – and the City, as well. In this way, they don't need to know every single alleyway and shop; they're simply there when the PCs arrive.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

While commerce is the city's life's blood, government and infrastructure are its flesh and bones. Without these municipal systems in place, the city and its citizens would fall into chaos, unable to access even basic necessities like electricity, water, and sanitation. Metropolitan police protect their safety and well-being, enforcing laws and preventing criminality. Emergency services and hospitals provide immediate relief and continued health care to imperiled citizens. Local bureaucracy maintains the city's infrastructure, educational system, and utilities, as well as encourages commerce and trade. Zoning commissions mark out the city's expansion or sustain its historical sites, preserving and promoting the city's overall appearance.

As cities expand, the strain on their infrastructures intensify. New roads and buildings must be constructed, sometimes carved out of the city's once beautiful history. Water and power demands place additional strains on city employees and outdated systems. Entire neighborhoods can suffer brownouts or even perpetual power loss, as well as water contamination and shortages. Gentrification alters entire communities, forcing out less affluent citizens and creating new slums. Local schools and hospitals may offer reduced services or entirely close down. Where these deficiencies exist, urban decay blossoms and spreads, rotting the city from within.

No one likes to think about trash and sewage, but these utilities directly maintain the city's health and welfare. If garbage isn't picked up regularly, entire neighborhoods degrade and attract undesirables – feral pets, vermin, and other *things*. Poor sanitation and drinking water can lead to illness and death. Meanwhile, dumpster-divers can find rare and dangerous treasures, as well as unpleasant secrets. Recycling plants can dispose of bodies as easily as garbage. Incinerators turn the air thick with choking smoke and metallic taste; burning evidence of hideous crimes.

Even cities with strong economies and efficient governments host the elderly, and people suffering from addiction and mental issues. More often than not, urban services catering to these special needs populations are antiquated and underfunded, placing additional pressures on the overstrained bureaucracies. People are disenfranchised, ignored, and shuffled around, rarely being provided the services they desperately require. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, many of these individuals are targeted by the Higher Powers, which feed upon their suffering and torment. Where these systems fail, the Illusion fractures from anguish and suffering, perpetuating this cycle of need and despair.

TRANSPORTATION

If buildings are the city's body, then roads are its circulatory system. Thriving hubs of trade and travel, cities require effective transportation systems. Otherwise, they quickly die, as their commerce and population is stifled – even halted. Depending on its physical location, this infrastructure becomes increasingly vital, depending on networks of alleys, bridges, highways, railways, and tunnels. As they grow, cities need larger transportation hubs, such as airports, rail yards, ports, and waterways.

People may wish to commute to the suburbs or outlying areas. They have to travel great distances across the urban landscape. As many – if not most – lack access to personal vehicles, cities also require public transportation systems to effectively move its citizens around. These are typically buses, cabs, ferries, and subways. Depending on the city's infrastructure and economic stability, these alternative routes may not be reliable – or even safe.

Due to high traffic volume, poor city planning, or geography, some cities feature highways and railroads running directly through them. Off-ramps and feeder roads disrupt regular traffic, while the ceaseless road noise detracts from the property value. Viaducts transform into demarcations between neighborhoods, creating permanent separations and obstacles to cross-travel.

THE UNDERGROUND

Due to the liminal nature of Time and Space, Elysium reflects Metropolis and all its inherent aspects. Similarly, it mirrors the persistent influence of the Underworld. Most cities in ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** have complex undergrounds, even if their real-world equivalents do not. As such, the GM should determine where the underground is located and its general qualities. Does the city feature a metro/subway system, and how far does it extend? Does the transportation system incorporate these facilities, such as highways and railroads? What city infrastructure is stored here, such as sanitation, water, power, and maintenance and steam tunnels? Are there major subterranean

facilities, such as business, malls, car parks, and shelters? Can they be accessed easily and how frequently are they used? Do they have any disreputable or hidden functions, such as criminal activity or secret cemeteries? Are there any significant physical and social issues with these areas, such as damage, flooding, or vagrancy? Is it extensive enough to host entire communities, both permanent and transitory? These areas are inherently connected to the Underworld; thus, they are influenced by its associated Powers and various entities. Every underground can be as divergent and intriguing as the GM requires, providing unique narratives for them to explore.

The City's Soul

As important as its physical aspects are, the Living City's true essence and personality originates from its people. However, urban areas are more than their demographics; they reflect the cultural beliefs of those living within their borders. These personalized stories help shape the city, as much as it defines its citizens. Indeed, many people specifically identify themselves by the place they call *home*. They are the city's soul, first and foremost.

When constructing the setting, the GM should consider who lives there and how their attitudes and beliefs have influenced the city's divergent aspects; coinciding with the city's Cultural & Historical Details (see above). More importantly, she should identify people's most recognizable characteristics, flaws, and virtues. These can be reflected through common personality traits, such as being friendly/impolite, open/detached, and industrious/relaxed. Do they speak differently, such as specific accents or localized slang? Are there prominent languages and do they vary by district? Do they share specific likes and dislikes, such as entertainment, food, and sports? Do they commonly affiliate themselves with unique groups/organizations or share the same political/religious views? What are their attitudes on outsiders? In short, what immediately identifies them as being from that city?

This level of world-building allows the GM to quickly develop the archetypal citizen. From there, the GM can populate their narrative space with more believable NPCs, establishing credibility and diversity in the fiction.

The GM decides to create her own city: New Verci. This resort city offers pleasant days and warm nights, hosting numerous beaches. Its citizens are open, friendly, and easygoing. This laidback attitude can be off-putting to those unaccustomed to the city's slower pace. Although most speak English, they prefer Spanish, which affects their accent. Despite their openness, Versey can be clannish, preferring to marry locally. As such, many share familial traits.

PEOPLE ON THE STREET

Once they've established these local traits, the GM can begin creating important individuals and prominent citizens. These can vary tremendously, depending on the story's requirements. Even if they're not fully detailed, the players will know who the movers and shakers are. These people may become narratively significant, especially if they're antagonists and/or act against the PCs' best interests. These NPCs also help the GM represent the city through its people, providing additional atmosphere and context to the PCs' world. Initially, these should be brief character outlines, accenting their most recognizable qualities. When necessary, the GM – and players – can further develop these individuals into fully formed NPCs, as discussed in ***Flesh & Soul*** (p. 77).

Firstly, the GM should develop the city's main *power-brokers*, such as authority figures, business people, municipal officials, and law enforcement. Who are the most recognized figures in society, such as local celebrities, civic leaders, and prominent families? What are they best known for? In more corrupt cities, these power-brokers can include criminals and underworld figures; many of whom may

be feared or worshipped. If their machinations affect the main story, how so? Are any associated with the Higher Powers? If so, which ones? All possess individual goals and motivations, which may directly/indirectly affect the story and PCs. They may also be tied to the PCs' Disadvantages and Dark Secrets. Depending on the narrative role, these NPCs can become *Leaders* on the Intrigue Map.

Secondly, the GM should develop individuals who will contribute to the main story at some point. Usually, these are NPCs with important information, opportunities, and/or skills that can advance the narrative somehow. Some are potential employers or patrons, who hire the PCs or ask their assistance. Some offer resources and services the PCs need to complete their objectives. They can be the PCs' collaborators, colleagues, and peers, sharing goals and information. Others may be associated with the city's power-brokers, potentially offering insight into their machinations. In most cases, their involvement will directly benefit the PCs, but these people may use the PCs to advance their individual agendas. During play and downtime, these NPCs can become established Contacts, and even important *Relations*.

Finally, the GM should create any peripheral NPCs, who directly influence the PCs' lives. Although they may play minor roles, their narrative involvement benefits the PCs somehow. They are fixtures in the PC's daily existence, offering emotional, mental, and physical support outside the main storyline. They may provide comfort and companionship, such as the friendly bartender, ex-lover, or biweekly therapist. Others offer important resources, such as the obliging journalist, helpful librarian, or knowledgable cabbie. Typically, these are considered *Contacts* or *Relations*, and the player should contribute to their character development. If the GM wishes, players can contribute two to four NPC outlines of people their PC interacts with on a daily basis.

GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Every city's economic and communal power resides with specific groups and organizations.

Their affiliations and goals can vary tremendously, be they financially, governmentally, or religiously motivated. However, most are associated with or controlled by the city's *power-brokers*, as discussed above. These organizations may be firmly entrenched in the city's history or recent addictions to its power-structure. Depending on their resources, the group's influence may only affect specific municipal agencies, neighborhoods, industries, or public sectors. More prosperous and well-connected organizations may extend far beyond the city limits, driven by the motivations of outside influences. Many will be associated with the Higher Powers, Forgotten Gods, or Children of the Underworld, even if its membership never recognizes the Truth. Different cults may guide the city leaders, manipulating them to fulfill their destinies.

The GM should generate *three to five* major groups/organizations, as well as briefly describe their underlying motivations. Although the PCs may never directly encounter these groups, they'll be aware of who guides the city, contributing directly to the setting's fiction. As the story progresses, these groups/organizations can – and will – alter the city's evolution and existence, thus affecting the overall setting. In turn, these changes may affect the PCs, usually through their Advantages, Dark Secrets, and Disadvantages. The GM and players can incorporate these changes into downtime, both narratively and mechanically. If required, the GM can develop these groups in significant hubs on the Intrigue Map, as discussed in ***Arcana and Apparitions*** (p. 132).

- Seeking reelection, the *Mayoral Committee* cracks down on crime in the city. This places additional pressure on the PCs with ***Wanted***; *whenever they attract attention* they **roll +1**, instead of the normal **+0**.
- The PCs failed ***Authority*** roll attracts the unwanted attention of *The Static* – a citywide cult that secretly controls the city's media coverage. During the game, the GM expends their Hold to have its membership launch a negative news campaign of *The Academic's* research.
- The players follow an unexpected narrative thread, seeking information from local vagrants. The GM uses this opportunity to introduce the *Trashmen* – a group of sanitation workers who pilfer business paperwork and receipts for profit.
- **The Fixer's** benchmen frequently interact with the city's *Port Authority*. The player rolls *success with complications* on their **Boss** check, causing the organization financial issues. During Downtown, the *Port Authority* sets up the benchmen to allay suspicions.
- The *Transportation Union* announces citywide strikes for its workers. As buses and subways shut down, the city is thrown into chaos. The PCs must continually deal with traffic jams and heavy delays when trying to traverse the metro area.

Cracks in the Facade

Despite our imprisonment, humanity retains an unconscious desire to rebuild Metropolis. We yearn for its past glories and dark pleasures, reflecting them in our architecture and constructions. We raise imposing towers and luxurious structures to appease our wounded pride. We delve into the earth, desperately seeking the vile pleasures of Inferno and the Underworld. Our Jailers allow us these delusions, feeding our vanity, as we construct our prison walls.

Yet, as the Illusion crumbles, our false world reconnects with Metropolis, allowing its various districts to seep through. The Living City. The Ruins. The City of the Dead. The Machine City. We see these grotesque wonders and remember what was denied us. We pull at the scars, opening them wider, and letting them bleed. In these wounded places, Time and Space lose all meaning and Elysium surrenders itself to what was, and what will be again.

When developing the city, the GM should consider where the Illusion is thin and/or more prone to crumble. Although Metropolis is omnipresent, there are certain urban areas more prone to its intrusions. The following are locations commonly associated with the Original City and the Higher Powers. When the PCs are in these locations, the GM can *tear back the Illusion to reveal the True Reality behind it*. She should also remember to *defy player expectations*, transforming normally innocuous locations into bizarre and terrifying reflections.

BASTIONS OF POWER

Humanity continuously honors itself, constructing edifices to reflect its grandeur. From the Giza Necropolis to the Burj Khalifa, the Temple of Artemis to the Eiffel Tower, these *bastions of power* were built to appease prideful men. Some wanted to chronicle their achievements, while others sought to recapture their lost immortality. Built at tremendous cost, most bastions have dark histories, staining their grandeur in blood and misery. Disturbing truths and mythologies weaken the Illusion, further connecting these famous structures to Metropolis and the Higher Powers. The GM should consider what aspects of the True Reality the city's landmarks are affiliated with, weaving their influence into the fiction.

Numerous cities also host bastions of power that directly reflect the Higher Powers and their Principles. More concept than construction, these iconic landmarks specifically represent beliefs and ideals in the human consciousness. Washington's Capitol Building resides in Kether's Citadel, while Paris's Notre Dame falls under Binah's influence. Entire sections of The Hague itself dwell within Geburah's Citadel, empowered by our global belief in justice. As our cognitive association intensifies, these bastions of power grow in strength and influence over the city, and humanity itself.

Similarly, smaller cities may have specific bastions of power, such as marketplaces and business towers, churches and synagogues, courthouses and police stations, and universities and research labs. How they are perceived – and the ideals and concepts they represent – directly affects their psychic connection to Metropolis. Inglorious locations can reside in Inferno; the Illusion weakened by their past, as well as their reputation. The entertainment quarter may open pathways to Limbo and the Realms of Passion. As such, the GM should have some knowledge of their importance and their past, which may influence the ongoing narrative. When the PCs travel to these bastions of power, the GM can employ their Moves associated with the ruling Principle or Realm.

CONSPIRACIES & CONFLICTS

The Higher Powers are locked in perpetual conflict, striving to expand and maintain their control over humanity. Their conspiracies and machinations resonate throughout Elysium, transforming entire cities into their battlegrounds. These intangible struggles have very real and profound economic and social effects, as their minions strive to fulfill their goals. Sometimes, these metaphysical hostilities spill over into Elysium, unleashing true horrors upon the city. The GM should know what major forces are moving beyond the Illusion, and how the PCs may become embroiled in their conflicts. Although this may be subtle, over the campaign's progression these factors may have increasingly profound effects on their PCs' lives.

CITY OF THE DEAD

Cities are built upon the bones of their people. As virtually all human bodies are interred in some form or fashion, city planners must incorporate these necropolises into their city planning, as well as deal with unique environmental concerns. Hong Kong's iconic cemeteries resulted from spatial constraints and hilly terrain. In New Orleans, settlers were forced to construct above-ground mausoleums due to water saturation. Paris's infamous catacombs were used to house human remains from the city's emptied graveyards. Death is also entwined with customs, history, and taboos, so burial places reflect the local cultures and faiths. Modeled after German forest cemeteries, Skogskyrkogården outside of Stockholm focuses on natural tranquility. The Glasgow Necropolis was designed in the Victorian traditions, consisting of an informal park and grand monuments.

In truth, these burial places, cemeteries, and graveyards all reflect the *City of the Dead*; a vast necropolis within the Original City. Humanity unconsciously remembers this hallowed place, honoring its sacred hills and vast tombs with their inferior renditions. Yet, the Illusion's hold over these hallowed places remains tenuous, at best. Weakened by faith and fear, the veil frequently parts, drawing the unlucky and unwary into the City of the Dead. Even the Higher Powers and their minions rarely tread here, fearing the strange entities that eternally walk between its ancient sepulchers and tombstones.

THE BEATING HEART OF INDUSTRY

Our False World is driven by humanity's needs and wants. Cities were built upon foundations of fear and greed, devoted to maintaining the status quo that imprisons us. From birth, we're taught to strive and survive, lest we be cast into poverty and degradation. But behind Elysium's monuments to commerce and industry lurks the Illusion's true engine – *The Machine City*. This technological monstrosity empowers our prison's arcane machinery, enslaving us through its ceaseless influence.

But, as the Illusion fails, so too does the Machine's City's intricate mechanisms. Now, its reflection bleeds through our boardrooms and factories, revealing the heartless monstrosities behind the veil. On certain nights, our ports and railways supply its ceaseless foundries and forges with fresh offerings. On technology farms, Awakened inventors devote themselves to duplicating its horrific grandeurs. Our cell-towers and phone lines filter signals from its communication hubs, twisting our minds with alien messages. Toxic gases and poisonous waters bleed through the Illusion, destroying and mutating our pristine world. Wherever one looks, the Machine City intrudes upon our urban landscape – and we rarely recognize the Truth.

As such, the GM should familiarize herself with their city's main businesses, industries, and transportation hubs, and how the Machine City affects them. In these locations, the PCs may inadvertently find themselves trapped within Metropolis's mechanical heart, lost amongst the clockworks, conveyor belts, and furnaces.

URBAN DECAY

A sickness infects Elysium. Wherever despair and desperation dwell, the slow rot of urban decay spreads. This infection has many origins, such as crime, depopulation, poverty, and unemployment. Over time, entire communities and neighborhoods can fall into disrepair and dissolution. Buildings and tenements are abandoned and condemned, as businesses and factories are boarded up and forgotten. Slums, grey fields, and urban prairies replace once-vibrant areas. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, this urban blight only intensifies, worsened by outside influences. As the Illusion fails, Metropolis and Elysium merge – with tragic consequences.

Due to their prevalence and connection to Metropolis, the GM should determine where the city's slums and urban wastelands are located. In most cases, these serve as the borderlands between our world and the True Reality.

CHAPTER 5

ARCANA AND APPARITIONS

DIANA MOVED GINGERLY THROUGH CRAMPED SHELVES OF TRINKETS and lacquer-ware. For its wearied appearance, the curio shop contained an impressive fortune. "You said you have several witch's bottles?" she asked the shadows. Unseen, the shopkeeper replied, "Yes. People wish to rid themselves of such things. They find their way here." Diana knew the folk tales well; how witches trapped demons and faeries within inanimate objects. She turned the corner, still unable to find the speaker. "Then you have it?"

"The Greybeard? Oh yes." Something clinked down beside Diana, startling her. The gnarled shopkeeper now stood there; the salt-glazed bottle in hand. "This is what you seek." She didn't recognize the delicate scripts; something infinitely older than the ancient container. "I'll take it," she said, automatically, reaching for her purse. The shopkeeper's smile thinned, "I know, miss. As does it."

Diana frowned, "So, how much?" He thrust the bottle into her hands, "More than you can possibly imagine." Confused, she tried asking again, but found herself alone. "It is yours," the shadows said sadly. "Go."

OVERVIEW

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, humanity's deep passions and sublime emotions can assume countless forms and guises. These physical manifestations of myth possess deep meaning and significance. We construct stories around them and, in turn, their legends reshape our world. *Arcana and Apparitions* provides the gamemaster (GM) with new tools for developing *objects* and *monsters* as narrative elements, as well as incorporating them as hubs on the Intrigue Map. This includes suggestions for using them to enhance the conversation and expand their setting's fiction.

OBJECTS OF DESIRE AND DREAD

Unlike general purpose equipment and everyday items, objects represent narrative elements with plot significance, both to the conversation and PCs. Depending on their specific purpose, they can be introduced as precious mementos, religious talismans, and valuable clues. Despite their mundane appearance, function, or purpose, objects are always narratively important. Many possess deep meaning and power, yet are completely innocuous to the casual observer. Others reflect different Principles or similar philosophical beliefs – potentially manifesting these concepts by their mere existence. While many objects are inanimate and inert, some are enlivened by dreams, madness, passions, and memories. Existing outside the Illusion's control, they gain agency and identity, seeking to fulfill their own goals.

Generally, objects are directly linked to the PCs as hubs on the Intrigue Map, including their Dark Secrets and Disadvantages. Common examples include ***Artifact***, ***Divine Champion***, ***Guardian***, and ***Heir***. However, objects are also physical elements of the plot which need to be assembled, collected, destroyed, or protected to advance or resolve important character and story arcs. In either case, their influence resonates through the overall plot, operating on different narrative levels. However, due to their prevalence as established horror tropes, the GM needs to handle objects carefully to avoid becoming derivative. She should always strive to make each one unique, either in form or function, thus empowering the fiction rather than detracting from it.

Purpose

When developing an object, the GM first needs to determine its distinct *purpose*. This concept defines an object's narrative role, as well as its importance to specific character and story arcs. In most cases, each object has one of the following narrative purposes: *Clue*, *Memento*, *Phenomena*, *Red Herring/MacGuffin*, *Talisman*, or *Token*. The object's purpose can also help inspire the GM while she develop its different qualities, such as physical appearance, background, and function. These archetypal descriptors also help establish the object's location on the Intrigue Map, and its associated links. Although Artifacts can share similar characteristics, their narrative significance and power places them in their own category (see p. 138).

CLUE

Clues represent plot devices directly related to important story elements, such as mysteries, NPCs, and supernatural creatures. They provide players new information and insights into the narrative, revealing histories, missing information, and hidden plot points. Clues can also provide knowledge about the PCs themselves and their Dark Secrets. When used correctly, clues grant the PCs some tangible story benefit, such as allowing them to circumnavigate threats, providing important evidence, reducing research time, or revealing an NPC's strengths and weaknesses. Clues can also serve as links on the Intrigue Map, narratively tying different hubs and plot elements together.

Clues can be physical items, such as broken glass, strange photographs, magical tomes, stolen goods, and even bodies. However, they don't have to be tangible to convey information and may include computer data, bloody fingerprints, audio recordings, and unnatural graffiti. Any object that provides narratively significant information can be considered a clue. However, clues do not need to – nor should they! – fully reveal plot elements. Clues are puzzle pieces for players to put together and form their own conclusions.

Generally, the GM should have some pregenerated clues for the players to discover with successful Advantage and Move rolls, such as ***Investigate*** or ***Observe a Situation***. As the conversation progresses, the GM may spontaneously introduce clues to accentuate and reveal unexplored parts of the conversation. This allows the story to progress naturally, even if the players haven't discovered vital information – by chance or circumstance.

- **The Midnight Train**: The 'Special Transfer' ticket stub was issued only days ago. However, the Market Subway's southbound train hasn't run in decades.
- **The Collection**: A collection of ten polaroids shows different doorways across the city. Initially, they appear unrelated to one another; some are abandoned buildings, while others lead into restaurants or banks. Upon further investigation, PCs learn each location is owned by the same organization.
- **The Dining Set**: A gift from a distant relative, the dark walnut box contains an elegant silverware set. Several pieces have traces of human blood. The flatware features the crest of an elite family, who have political ties to city officials.
- **The Ledger**: A ledger contains business dealings between several export companies. All but one recurring transaction has been properly logged and notated. The anomalous, weekly entries are marked only with a crude grail symbol.
- **The Torso**: The bloodless torso has been immaculately cleaned, its skin bleached an unnatural color Octagonal patches have been expertly removed from its back, forming the Sefirot. The precision of each cut hints at previous medical training.

MEMENTO

Mementos are objects directly associated with the PC's backstory. However, most mementos rarely have plot value beyond establishing some emotional connection between the PC and an event, NPC, or other aspect of their personal history. Some mementos are passed down through generations, while others are recent acquisitions, commemorating special events. These keepsakes hold special value to the PC, be it practical or sentimental, but may appear insignificant to others. As the story progresses, the GM may lend mementos narrative power beyond their emotional significance; particularly, if the memento is linked to the PCs' Dark Secret or Disadvantages. With the GM's permission, mementos may provide temporary psychological benefits, such as bonuses to ***Keep it Together*** rolls or increasing **Stability**. Of course, they can have the opposite effect if lost or destroyed.

- **Children's book**: Its colorful pages are filled with drawings and messages secretly shared between identical twins. Now, it's the only physical reminder of the other sibling, who disappeared without trace.
- **Record collection**: The LPs once belonged to the PC's parent, amassed over decades. Strangely, all the bands have faded into complete obscurity, with some now totally unheard of. In each case, their haunting music and esoteric lyrics speak of other worlds shaped in dreams.
- **Old photo album**: An ugly binder filled with yellowing pictures of family road trips. In addition to commonplace photos, each trip features one group shot, standing in front of an outcropping of black rock. Although set in vastly different locations, the monolithic stones are virtually identical.
- **Cigar box**: Its wooden exterior features intricately drawn maps from the city's past. Inside, it contains hundreds of paper fortunes, the sugar cookie smell still lingering. Whenever read, the aphorisms and prophecies are unnervingly relevant.
- **Bronze statuette**: The sculpture was given to the PC by his great-grandparent just before passing away. The seraphim's face is tucked beneath broken wings, its body curled up as if in agony.

PHENOMENA

Phenomena are mysterious and unsettling objects with questionable origins. They usually feature bizarre and impossible designs; their function, operation, and purpose are completely alien. In truth, these uncanny mixtures of technology and magic are 'mundane' objects from Metropolis (or other Realms) or which have somehow remained untouched by the Illusion. This makes phenomena both dangerous and highly sought after, as they are pieces of humanity's lost past.

Phenomena differ from Artifacts (p. 138) in that their use and true abilities remain forever elusive and cryptic. Narratively, they exist to invoke dread and awe, enhancing the story's atmosphere and fiction. They rarely, if ever, provide tangible benefits to anyone attempting to use them. Occasionally, their mere existence can affect the Illusion and alter reality in strange and violent ways. As such, the GM can invoke soft and hard Moves while the PCs are in one's presence.

- **The Cardboard House**: The cardboard box is indestructible, withstanding any attacks. Its interior remains dry and warm, no matter the exterior conditions. Inside it, an average sized person can lie down comfortably. A sickly-sweet stink emanates from the box, accompanied by the ceaseless buzzing of insects.
- **The Meat**: Roughly a foot in diameter, the fleshy blob physically responds to touch, rippling and undulating. Any injuries remain bloodless, healing with unnerving speed. The flesh is tasteless, yet nutritious.
- **The Engine**: The intricate construct of machine parts, tubes, and polished metal continually runs without any outward energy source. Its pistons glisten with seminal fluid, while musky steam rises from organic openings.
- **The Glass Tree**: Shards of broken glass decorate the branches of this hand-twisted wire tree. When bathed in moonlight, the shards reflect different landscapes, ranging from toxic wastelands to radiant paradises.
- **The Urn**: The ceramic urn has been carved with sensual monstrosities, which curl around its oval structure. A bronze latch holds the lid down. Inside, grey ash and bone meal line the interior. If emptied, these cremated remains return once the urn is opened again.

RED HERRING/MACGUFFINS

Prevalent in mystery narratives, *red herrings* appear to be clues, but are specifically meant to mislead, distract, or confuse, usually leading players to make the wrong conclusions. They can be generated due to failed rolls and/or the GM's discretion, such as triggering Holds. Depending on the conversation, red herrings can even produce separate subplots on the Intrigue Map. For example, following a failed ***Crime Scene Investigator*** roll, the players erroneously track the evidence into an underground zeloth's lair.

In contrast, *MacGuffins* are vital to the overall plot, serving as narrative catalysts and triggers. However, unlike *tokens* (see below), the object's role is geared toward inspiring character motivations, such as finding, destroying, or protecting the item. Effectively, they serve as links on the Intrigue Map, joining important plot elements together. These objects may be tangible, or could only be ideas or concepts to be sought out, lacking physical form.

Once introduced, red herrings and MacGuffins can intrigue players for ages, even if they lack narrative resolutions. Many players instinctively latch onto these objects, creating their own narratives. As such, the GM should pay close attention to player reactions during the conversation, as they may infuse these objects with intricate back stories. Their personal interpretations may generate new and intriguing plot elements. In this case, the GM can change the object's importance to the current or future storylines – and look cool in doing so, as the players will likely believe they planned from the start. However, they may place so much significance on the red herring/MacGuffin that it detracts for the actual story; so use caution.

The Student ID [Red Herring]: Found on the body, the student ID belongs to the victim's ex-partner. secretly kept it after the break-up, as part of their obsession. In truth, the ex barely recalls them.

The Fossil [Red Herring]: Located in the academic's study, the fossilized *thing* appears malformed and twisted, like some ancient beast. A tie-tag notates its discovery at the nearby quarry. In truth, it's some harmless curiosity they picked up during their daily walk.

The Sea Chest [Red Herring]: At the bottom of the fish tank, the sea chest contains a small, numbered key. It opens a safety deposit box, which contains love letters from the NPC's affair. These reveal more about the NPC's hidden life, but are generally not helpful.

The Rug [MacGuffin]: The silk-wool rug has been passed down through generations. People believe that by following its labyrinthine design, one can open portals to the Underworld. The story's antagonist seeks it to release the God they worship.

The Data [MacGuffin]: A USB drive contains incriminating evidence against the local politician, connecting them to the death cult's activities. They'll do anything to get this back, including destroying the PC's life in the process.

TALISMAN

Talismans are objects intimately connected to one of the Realms, such as Death or Madness, or one of the Principles, such as Community or Exclusion. Originally, these were mundane items, and typically still maintain their normal *outward* appearance. However, through some arcane or traumatic event, the talisman has become empowered, weakening the Illusion's hold over it. These psychic connections allow unsettling phenomena and manifestations to occur around them. Some may possess unusual qualities, such as being indestructible or perpetually functioning.

While usually associated with specific characters and/or events, some talismans are so potent that their power persists long after their creator's death. Although not as potent as Artifacts, talismans can potentially affect and weaken the Illusion. Some may possess minor abilities, triggered under specific circumstances or completely at random. These manifestations are represented as GM soft and hard Moves, usually reflecting the forces associated with the talisman.

- **The Lunch Box**: Age has muted the box's design to soft grey shadows. Dozens of old baseball and hockey cards are stuffed inside, which were used to attract unwary children. Their betrayal and suffering lingers on, connecting the lunch box to Chagidiel's Citadel.
- **The Night Light**: When plugged in, the cat-shaped lamp projects glimmering stars and plays soft lullabies. It once belonged to a troubled child, whose chronic nightmares weakened the Illusion. Now, the night light serves as a beacon for malign entities in Limbo.
- **The Swear Jar**: The innocuous glass jar is crudely marked *Dady's Swares*. Years of drunken anger and frustration poured into the container thinned the Illusion. Now, it can channel voices to Metropolis. Eventually, something whispers back, manipulating the weak-willed into acts of violence.
- **The Wedding Dress**: The exquisite dress cost its former owner everything; the focal point of her perfect wedding. After being left at the altar, her life imploded, resulting in her eventual suicide. Transformed into a Purgatide, she can possess anyone who wears the dress, seeking vengeance against her former fiance.
- **The Junker**: The rusted Vauxhall Astra sits in the overgrown lot. Its interior stinks of motor-oil and rot, accompanied by unpleasant hum. On certain nights, anything placed in the empty hatchback disappears, transported to Machine City.

TOKEN

Tokens are objects required to move the plot forward, allowing the PCs to resolve critical moments in the story arc. For more complex stories, several related tokens may be required to successfully conclude scenario milestones. Typically, by lacking one or more tokens, the PCs run into far more difficulty than they otherwise might. While they can still conclude the story, possessing the token makes it easier.

Depending on their nature, tokens may resemble other objects, such as *mementos* or *phenomena*, and possess their associated qualities. In some cases, tokens may initially have no apparent use. As the story progresses, the PCs will discover their narrative significance. However, the GM should make sure not to diminish the object's importance, or offer false promises. In effect, tokens are the keys to the players' ultimate success (or failure).

- **The Drop key**: The tarnished elevator drop key has been etched with the words '13, Markve.' It opens the elevator door on the Markve Building's 13th floor. If turned in the correct order, the door opens onto one of the lower floors of Malkuth's Citadel, which the PCs must access to save their friend.

- **The Coin**: The silver dollar has been stamped with a woman's face on one side and an hourglass on the other. Along its edges, 'Do What Thou Wilt,' is written in Old High German. The coin must be provided to the S&M club's bouncer to gain entrance to its reflection in Inferno.
- **The Punch Card**: The stained time-punch card seems out of place, neatly placed in the magician's journal. However, if lined up with markers on each page, the holes reveal coded messages hidden amongst the text.
- **The Bloody Feather**: The large white feather has been tied on a worn leather string, forming a necklace. Torn from an angel, its tip eternally drips blood, discoloring anything it touches. This blood magically hides the anointed ones from Elohim. Without it, the PCs will likely be killed upon entering the lictor's communal chamber.
- **The Gas Mask**: The WWI gas mask projects the wearer's perceptions back through Time & Space to 1917. This allows the PC to slip through the Illusion and navigate his way through the maze of trenches. However, they also become vulnerable to the numerous threats existing in that time period.
- **Blood Diamonds**: The conflict diamonds are perfectly polished and cut, glittering with fleeting colors. Imbued with anguish and pain, they're prized commodities amongst infernalists and Death magicians. Beyond the Illusion, the diamonds resemble bloodied eyes, warm to the touch and continually pulsing.
- **The Grand Piano**: This antique piano was refurbished into an office desk. However, its former owner's obsessions connected the lavish instrument to Limbo. In dreams, it exists as an organic monstrosity of flesh, wood, and wires. If fed blood, vestigial mouths sing discordant melodies that echo in the mind.
- **The Coloring Book**: In Elysium, the child's memento is perfectly colored with crayons, revealing an impressive talent. However, beyond the veil, the fantasy characters and landscapes become nightmarish. On each page, a tall, hideous man tortures two small children, who cower in fear.
- **The Truck**: A labour of love, the yellow truck has been maintained and rebuilt over several decades. Behind the Illusion, the owner's sins are revealed, as the entire truck bed holds reflections of the naked torsos of his former victims. They squirm and writhe, helplessly trying to escape their metallic prison.

Visage

Due to the Illusion, an object's *true* appearance may be completely dissimilar to the one presented in our world. This actuality is known as *visage*, which represents an object's various incarnations beyond the Illusion. As such, the GM should also consider how the object appears should the PCs ***See Through the Illusion***. Usually, an object's visage will be associated with its purpose and history. This can also include its connections to the Higher Powers and/or the Realms, which influence its basic nature.

As with Metropolis and the other Realms, an object's visage need not adhere to natural laws or physics, and may differ wildly in dimension and scale. Under the right conditions, an object's true form may bleed through into Elysium with subtle or profound consequences – reflected as soft or hard GM Moves. Due to their arcane power, visage is very important when developing *Phenomena* and Artifacts.

Visage can provide GMs with opportunities for introducing compelling narratives and plot-twists into the stories. Several myths about enchanted items originate from this concept, such as the legends of faerie gold and mermaid tears. Living beings may be horribly warped to inanimate creations, their conscious minds being slowly shredded beyond the veil. Other objects may contain entire worlds beyond the Illusion, waiting to be explored or unleashed. Be creative and ignore physical limitations.

- **The Penitent One** – The weathered statue depicts a kneeling monk. Once an acolyte of Chokmah, the human was transformed into his current state. When the Illusion thins, the trapped soul radiates with golden light and can communicate. However, after centuries of imprisonment, he's now completely out of touch.

Fleshing Out

Once an object's purpose is established, the GM can further develop the threat's narrative qualities. The greater the object's importance to the story, the more in-depth the GM should describe it. The most basic qualities should include *Appearance*, *Background*, *Function*, and *Location*. Depending on the object's purpose, this may also include *Connections* and *Influences*. Significant objects should be developed like living NPCs, providing them with unique traits and personalities. This process elevates these threats from being mere props to actively affecting the conversation, as well as building the narrative foundations for their continued involvement in the story.

Finally, the GM determines if and where the object should appear on the Intrigue Map and what established links it possesses. Normally, this process is completed secretly, but for PC-specific objects, such as mementos, the GM should involve the owning player in the creation process. Although they may not know an object's hidden qualities, their participation emotionally invests them in its importance. Depending on the story, players may also (un)consciously develop object threats (see ***Let the Players Guide the Way***, p. 138).

APPEARANCE

The GM should consider all of an object's traits, as they may have narrative importance. What physical features does the object have, such as shape, size, or weight? Is it ordinary or remarkable? Are there any memorable details, such as coloration, sounds, or what it feels like to touch? Is it ornamental or useful? Is it new or old, in mint condition or well used? Does the object still work or has it been damaged? Does its appearance feature any uncanny qualities, be it normally or under certain circumstances? Does it possess intangible qualities, such as generating sounds, smells, or an unusual aura? The latter traits can be tied directly to an object's *visage*.

The Ashtray [Talisman]: The aluminum ashtray is lightweight and curled at its edges. Its silver star imprint is hidden under years of use. Someone has etched into the bottom, "Dallas 11/63." Crumpled cigarette butts fill it completely. If the ashtray is emptied, the cigarette butts return within a night. The scent of blood and smoke lingers around it. Its metal feels slimy to the touch.

BACKGROUND

The GM should know the object's basic background and history, particularly, if it resides on the Intrigue Map. Where did it originate from? Did someone create/build it, and, if so, why? Was there an original owner? If so, did they sell, gift, or lose it? Depending on the object's age and importance, has it accumulated accessible information online, in books, or in historical archives? Fleshing out the object's history lends it an aura of mystique and realism, as well as establishing its narrative significance. Having an established background also provides players an opportunity to research and learn more about its origins through different Advantages. More potent objects may even accumulate legends and rumors. However, the GM needs to decide whether this information is true or mere speculation.

The Teapot [Clue]: The Yixing teapot was looted by French missionaries during the Boxer Rebellion. Several years later, it was illegally purchased by the Adair Family of Paris. Passed down, the pot is reserved for steeping special teas used in their Madness rituals. However, the pot was also documented by a Chinese antique dealer prior to its theft; records of its existence reside at their headquarters.

FUNCTION

Be they tool or trinket, objects generally serve some function. The GM should know what this is. Then, beyond its normal and mundane functions, what else can the object do, if anything? This can also include its narrative function, as *MacGuffins* or *tokens*. If the latter, how does it affect the story's progression? Can the PCs use the object to achieve different outcomes? Or is it simply an aspect of environmental storytelling, representing specific themes and concepts?

While objects lack the power of Artifacts, some can still affect reality, such as *phenomena* and *talismans*. In addition to influencing the world around them, objects linked to the True Reality may fray the Illusion or attract creatures. If it has some inherent powers, what are they? What triggers this effect? Or is it continuous? If the latter, the GM should develop some soft or hard Moves to represent these powers. Finally, is the object's power permanent or consumable, i.e., has limited uses?

Similarly, are there any threats associated with the object? Does the object have dangerous and unexpected side-effects? Are these dangers real or imaginary? Does the object have a strange effect on people or its surroundings, such as causing exhaustion, anxiety, or anger? Can it be triggered when PCs wear it, have it in their possession, or just when in its proximity? Does it give warning signs, such as becoming colder, hotter, or more oily to the touch? Do plants wither near it or animals become agitated? The GM should reflect its inherent traits in these signifiers, adding tension and mystery to the object's existence.

The Astrolabe [MacGuffin]: Part myth, part history, the ancient astrolabe is believed to have been constructed by Hypatia of Alexandria. However, rather than revealing our universe, her device reveals Metropolis's astronomical formations. If used correctly, it can dispel the Illusion. The astrolabe's secrets died with its creator's murder in 415 AD.

LOCATION

Depending on the scene, an object's location can become vital to the narrative. The GM should consider where the object has been placed and outline any details regarding this. Is the object located in plain sight, displayed prominently yet out of reach, or has it been hidden away? Is it readily available or do the PCs need to travel to it? Are there obstacles that prevent the PCs from acquiring the item freely? Indeed, entire stories can revolve around an object's location, which may also be associated with additional links and hubs on the Intrigue Map.

Corryn's Obelisk [Phenomena]: Recovered from an ancient burial mound, the inverted obelisk floats weightlessly off the ground. No matter what angle it is viewed from, only its 'face' stone can be seen; etched with the Svefnthorn symbol. Its current owner, Corryn Holm, has locked the obelisk away beneath her familial ranch. No one is allowed into the obelisk chamber except for trusted cult members. Armed guards stand outside day and night.

CONNECTIONS

An object's connections reflect its position on the Intrigue Map and the various links and hubs associated with it. The GM should consider the object's purpose and background while developing any connections. Most importantly, how does the object link various hubs together? Does it connect the player characters together? Are other people looking for, protecting, or trying to destroy it? Does it have some significance to groups and organizations present in the conversation? How well-known is the object to the general public? Does it reside in an important location on the Intrigue Map? Each link and hub provides the GM with potential narratives and story ideas.

Copper Coin [Memento]: The PC's sibling [hub: Contact] gave them this copper token before their ***Strange Disappearance*** [link]. It is imprinted with the name, *Jolar Amusement Center* [hub: Location]. However, this arcade also disappeared at the same time. The PC has tied similar disappearances across the country to these arcade coins.

INFLUENCES

Due to their arcane nature, some objects are associated with the Higher Powers and/or the Realms. The GM should consider what these influences are and how they affect the object physically and spiritually. This association may emotionally affect anyone around the object, including the PCs. More potent objects, such as *talismans* and *phenomena*, may actually alter the fabric of reality around them, subtly or violently.

Certain objects are inherently linked to the various Realms. Clockworks, electronics, and industrial equipment are tied to the Machine City, while art, mirrors, and musical instruments are associated with Limbo. A New Age religious object may be connected to Chesed, while an antique handgun may be linked to the Death Angel Hareb-Serap. Due to their strong symbolic association, they can be potentially used to weaken the Illusion. While less pronounced, these effects are similar to ***Fraying*** (p. 141). Similarly, associated objects can become thematic keystones in the overall narrative.

The Computer [Token]: The all-in-one computer still runs perfectly after several decades. The system folder contains the database for its owner's quantum network research. The PCs can only access the information they require on this antiquated software. The owner's work also thinned the Illusion, potentially altering Time & Space around the computer.

LET THE PLAYERS GUIDE THE WAY

In-game, some players will place significance onto objects, even if the GM has only mentioned them in passing. Players can heavily focus on these objects during the conversation, pressing the GM for details. When this occurs, **do not** discourage their interest. Indeed, feel free to exceed their expectations and encourage their creativity and interest further. Expand upon the object's description and purpose, weaving it into the story.

For example, the GM describes an abandoned study, including the malformed deer's head hanging over the fireplace. This environmental detail has *nothing* to do with the story. However, the players begin focusing solely on the deer head, investigating it further. As the conversation continues, the GM realizes the players consider this odd taxidermy an actual threat.

The GM could simply inform their players that the deer's head isn't important. However, this is a lost opportunity to generate fear and uncertainty. Instead, feed and play upon the players' expectations. Sure enough, its glassy eyes are always *watching* them. When they glance away, its deformed mouth twitches, as if breathing. Its pose subtly changes. For the players, this becomes their narrative focus, allowing the GM to create entirely new subplots, and the players are never the wiser.

Take inspiration from the players and let them guide the way. Rather than removing irrelevant elements, take creative license with them, and use them to enhance the narrative. Story opportunities await where they're least expected.

ARTIFACTS

Artifacts are *objects* that belong to the True Reality and operate beyond the Illusion's constraints. They can take numerous forms, such as devices, instruments, relics, and trinkets. Despite their mundane appearances, these arcane technologies and magical apparatuses are capable of altering, manipulating, and even destroying reality. Some existed long before the Demiurge's existence, designed by alien intelligences for purposes beyond our mortal comprehension. Others were created prior to imprisonment in the Illusion by the Forgotten Gods, the Higher Powers, or humanity itself. Some artifacts were developed recently by magicians, mediums, and the Children of the Underground, who desperately seek to break the Illusion's bonds and gain true power.

Although considered *objects* when added to the Intrigue Map, artifacts possess powers far beyond the constraints of *phenomena* and *talismans*. They grant supernatural abilities, allowing their owners to bend True Reality to their will, touch upon their former divinity, or unlock the dimensions of Time and Space. As with other object threats, artifacts are defined by their *purpose*; i.e., the reason they were created. However, due to their alienness, an artifact's ultimate function may never be fully understood by the players or the NPCs.

The GM can utilize the techniques below to fully develop the artifacts as object threats, plot devices, and narrative hubs. Although mechanically different from the Advantage, the GM and players are free to utilize these rules to develop PC-specific Artifacts (see *KDL*, p. 113), as well. Note, these rules offer only the basic framework and should not hinder the GM's narrative. They're free to develop artifacts far beyond the scope discussed here, providing them with campaign-altering abilities and powers, such as the Taroticum or Judas Grail.

Qualities

As with standard object threats, the GM begins by outlining the artifact's general qualities: *Appearance*, *Background*, *Function*, and *Location*, as well as its *Connections* and *Influences*. Artifacts simultaneously exist in Elysium and Metropolis, so the GM should consider the object's visage and if/how this affects its mundane appearance. From this overall description, they can then develop the artifact's Potential and Mythology, as well as outline its narrative role within the story.

Potential

Narratively, an artifact's *potential* represents its overall abilities and powers, allowing it to affect and/or alter some aspect of the True Reality. Mechanically, an artifact's potential provides the user – be they PC or NPC – with an additional Move (or Moves), which is defined by its *trigger* and *power*. the *trigger* defines what circumstances are required to activate the artifact, and the *power* defines the object's capabilities once its potential is unleashed. Generally speaking, if the Move could have different results, the GM should require a roll; if only one result is possible, the GM simply reveals the specific effect upon activation.

When a player character fulfills the artifact's required trigger, the controlling *player* makes an appropriate roll and determines the resulting effect. When a NPC fulfills the artifact's trigger, the GM chooses an appropriate Move for the resulting effect. In both cases, *if no roll is required*, the GM makes an appropriate Move to reflect the artifact's effect, once the trigger's requirements are met.

The Kumiho's Mask: The fox-like hahoetal mask originates from 12th-century Korea. A nobleman's spurned lover used the mask to change her appearance and replace his new bride. The dark magics required drove her insane, inspiring her to sate the mask's appetite for the livers of young men. After being executed for her crimes, the cursed mask was passed down through the generations.

When a character bathes the mask in blood from a fresh human liver, **roll +Soul**.

(15+) The mask bonds to the character's face, providing them with the physical appearance of anyone they desire. In effect, they become the person, including voice, inflection, and mannerisms. The mask must be reanointed with fresh blood every new moon (requiring another roll).

(10–14) The mask bonds to the character's face, providing them with the physical appearance of anyone they desire. However, some aspect of the disguise is flawed, allowing observant people to see through it. The mask must be reanointed with fresh blood every new moon (requiring another roll).

(–9) The kumiho (fox-demon) that created the mask appears and attempts to drag the character back to Inferno to feed on their liver.

When developing an artifact's potential, the GM should also consider the following questions. From the answers, she can establish the artifact's associated powers and triggers. In turn, this allows her to better formulate the associated Move (or Moves), and make the effects more narratively appropriate.

WHAT IS THE ARTIFACT'S MAIN PURPOSE?

First and foremost, the GM needs to determine the artifact's reason for existing. How was it constructed and what power(s) does it possess? Was it created deliberately or through some circumstance or misfortune? This reasoning can draw upon its *background*. Similarly, the GM should determine the artifact's general limitations and how it affects the True Reality. No matter their origins, in some form or fashion, all artifacts remain bound to one of the Higher Powers or Realms. This dominant influence may affect or hinder its powers, in some regard. For example, a scrying mirror connected to Madness would be unable to see creatures connected to the Realm of Passion. These various qualities also translate into its specific triggers, defining how it can be activated and used. For example, a weapon devoted to Death Angel Thaumiel would be empowered by paying him blood tribute, and be rendered useless in areas affected by the Archon Kether.

The Stone Tears: The Tears were ten memorial stones created by the Pilgrims of Suffering to honor their beloved Death Angels. Initially, they marked the beginning of each pilgrim's path. Now, the Tears have been scattered across Elysium, their purpose all but forgotten. If provided an offering worthy of the respective Death Angel, a Tear opens a portal to Inferno. However, the user must complete the pilgrimage or suffer the Death Angel's wrath.

WHAT ARE THE ARTIFACT'S OTHER CHARACTERISTICS?

Older and more potent artifacts may have additional abilities, powers, and magical qualities. If so, what are they, and do they have different requirements to unlock? They may also possess more mundane uses or enhance character Advantages, outside their magical purview. Indeed, clever players may utilize the artifact in an unexpected fashion to accomplish their goals, or turn its drawbacks to their advantage. The artifact itself may be sentient and act according to its own intents and purposes. If so, the GM should develop this personality, much like an established NPC. These qualities may open additional links on the Intrigue Map.

The Bloodthorn: This petrified wand was fashioned from the Black Tree's roots. Fed by the primal essence of tortured Enwildened Gods, the Bloodthorn possesses numerous mystical qualities, many of which remain undiscovered. Its most common abilities include controlling animals, quickening plant growth and pregnancies, afflicting humans with primal passions and feral emotions, and empowering its holder's senses. However, the Bloodthorn's connection to the Black Tree provided it with an alien intelligence, subtly manipulating the user to serve its sire.

WHO CAN USE THE ARTIFACT AND HOW?

Be they created through artifice or arcane means, all artifacts exist outside the boundaries of the Illusion. As such, not everyone can utilize them or unlock their full potential. To most Sleepers, artifacts remain invisible or appear as mundane items. They might activate an artifact by pure chance or misfortune, otherwise, it remains inert. Aware characters may feel oddly uncomfortable around artifacts, possibly noticing their *visage*. Such characters are also able to intentionally activate artifacts.

As discussed previously, each artifact is activated through specific requirements, known as its *trigger*. This should usually be defined as a simple statement or series of statements, if the artifact has different abilities. The GM should also consider other important factors. Can the artifact be activated by chance, mistake, or under its own sentience? Does it require a singular person or group ritual? Are there circumstances that increase its potential or weaken it?

These otherworldly creations offer tremendous power, but exact heavy costs. In addition to the trigger, the GM should consider what additional investments it demands. Is there some painful price required, such as bodily fluids, destroying personal items, or animal/human sacrifice? Are there lingering effects, such as exhaustion, pain, or curses? Are they obvious or only noticeable over time? *Everything has a cost*. This can tie heavily into an artifact's drawbacks (see below).

> **The Liston Knife**: The vintage amputation blade gleams, as pristine as its first use during the Crimean War. Drenched in anguish, the knife has become bound to the Death Angel Golab. When used as a weapon, the blade inflicts hideous pain and crippling injuries [**Serious Wound** and **-2 Stability**; Distance: arm]. *When used to ritually honor the Death Angel Golab*, the blade can rend reality and open a portal to his Citadel. Over time, the Knife mentally compels its owner to inflict harm, feeding on their darkest fantasies. Each week, the owner must roll to ***Keep it Together*** or lose **-1 Stability**.

WHAT DRAWBACKS DOES THE ARTIFACT HAVE?

Artifacts are inherently dangerous for numerous reasons, not the least of which is their intimate connection to the Higher Powers and Realms. In addition to their activation costs, many artifacts extract heavy prices from their owners afterwards. An artifact's mere proximity may warp its surroundings or those near it. It may weaken the Illusion, thinning the barriers between Elysium and other dimensions, and allow entities from either side to pass through. Sentient artifacts may mentally dominate and torment their owners, driving them into depraved acts. Their creators may attempt to influence the world through them. Due to their value, artifacts are also sought by dangerous creatures and desperate people, seeking to obtain the object's power at any cost. The GM can utilize Hold to reflect these drawbacks, introducing additional threats and revealing unseen dangers. Below are some examples of common drawbacks.

- **Call of the Void**: Consciously or by its nature, the artifact draws Creatures of the Realm to it. Anyone in its proximity is targeted by these entities, as the artifact allows them to enter Elysium more easily.
- **Demands Investiture**: The artifact continually requires some form of investiture or tribute. The sacrifice usually matches its otherworldly nature, but can include anything, such as bodily fluids, burnt offerings, and memories.
- **Desired by Others**: The artifact is well-known amongst certain circles and sought by dangerous individuals and groups. If the artifact's needs aren't served, it may actively call these people, seeking more compliant owners.
- **Mentally Influences Owner**: The artifact can mentally influence its user, subtly and overtly. It may alter and manipulate their emotions, perceptions, and thoughts. Typically, this influence aligns with the artifact's ruling Principle, guiding the owner toward it.
- **Nexus of Misfortune**: The artifact's aura invites discord and danger, bringing ruin to anyone who possesses it as well as their friends as loved ones. The GM may inflict hard Moves to represent this, inflicting cruel torments on the PCs for as long as they keep the artifact.
- **Nightmares/Visions**: The artifact's proximity causes continuous nightmares and strange visions. These mental projections may be insightful or completely unintelligible. Over time, they can drive the sufferer insane.
- **Twists Perception of Reality**: The artifact can actively alter the perceptions of those in its proximity. These alterations are usually illusionary, playing on the victim's senses. However, more powerful artifacts can completely warp the True Reality, drawing people through the Illusion.

CAN THE ARTIFACT BE DAMAGED/ DESTROYED?

Most artifacts exist beyond the Illusion and its constraints. As such, they're difficult – if not impossible – to destroy by mundane means. The GM should consider what forces can damage and destroy the artifact, be they mundane or supernatural. This process should be difficult to accomplish, but always within the realm of possibility. Indeed, every artifact should have some vulnerability, even if it is hidden. The GM can develop entire subplots revolving around the artifact's destruction, requiring the players to undertake multiple steps to fulfill this requirement.

Some artifacts may be damaged/destroyed through the very act of using them. Much like consumables, their use weakens them and diminishes their power, perhaps even completely draining their potential. Replenishing or preserving its power could have different requirements, some more grisly and taxing than others. The user may be completely unaware of this requirement, inadvertently destroying the artifact. Again, the GM can weave this concept into their narratives, providing the players questionable goals to preserve the artifact. In an off-shoot of this concept, they may need to complete specific tasks to recharge drained artifacts (see *Slumbering Giants*).

> **The Movie Poster**: This vintage movie poster is the last of its kind, made for *No Dawn Comes*, a monstrous exploitation film. Once activated, the poster serves as a gateway into the film's pocket dimension, lasting for the movie's original duration. However, this also allows things on the other side *out*. It cannot be physically destroyed by any means. It is only rendered inert if the movie's demonic antagonist is killed, thus changing the film's bleak ending.

SLUMBERING GIANTS

Some artifacts have existed for centuries, even millennia. Many arcane items have been lost through misadventure or purposefully hidden away. Some gather dust on a family shelf or a museum's displays, ignored as mere baubles and trinkets, their purpose forgotten over generations. When rediscovered, the artifact's true power may remain dormant. Much like a trigger, reawakening an artifact's power requires specific tasks, usually necessitating some great sacrifice on the part of the user. The GM can frame entire plot lines around this process, forcing players to go to great lengths to wake the power slumbering within.

The Pope's Skull: This terracotta bust originates from northern Italy, dating roughly to the Babylonian Captivity (1309 to 1376). Believed to be an antipope from that period, its head is a simple skull, void of pottery-flesh or papal ornamentation. Normally, it could answer questions about the Archon Binah, her Citadel, and Metropolis. To end its dormancy, the eyes and tongue of a living saint must be placed in the empty sockets and skeletal mouth.

Mythology

More powerful artifacts are so ancient and well-known that humanity has created mythologies around them, ranging from local folktales to world-spanning legends. Some drift through Time and Space, reshaping themselves to incorporate cultural narratives and pervading the societal consciousness. These can be holy relics, cursed magical items, or even consecrated remains. Over the centuries, these mythical paraphernalia become associated with religions and belief systems, utilized during blessed rituals and sacred festivities. Invested with faith and worship, mundane objects can become artifacts, gaining the ability to alter the True Reality through humanity's unconscious will.

Sleepers have a curious relationship with artifacts, as their ardent belief in miracles can trigger the powers of mythological artifacts. These make such artifacts highly dangerous, both to humanity and their jailers. For this reason, the world's cultures have been purposefully seeded with false idols and talismans to sow confusion, doubt, and misguided worship. Lictors and their minions frequently seek out and collect true artifacts, while using various churches and other groups to discredit actual miracles. They're aware that slivers of truth exist in all legends, and even the strangest beliefs can stem from reality. Similarly, magically-aware organizations recognize the mystical power of artifacts. Some groups attempt to collect and utilize these objects, while others seek to destroy them as potential threats to Elysium.

The Holy Grail: The Holy Grail has inspired pious awe and scientific debate for centuries. It features heavily throughout religious texts, historical books, and fantastical literature and cinema. It's become iconic within modern mythology, yet never been recovered. In truth, Yeshua's sacred cup probably no longer exists – or, if it does, in no way resembles the legendary artifact. More likely, its story dominates our culture to divert attention away from the reality shattering artifact known as the Judas Grail; its mythology suppressed by the fearful Higher Powers.

Fraying

Artifacts are intimately connected to the True Reality. While this arcane connection instills them with tremendous power, their mere existence thins the Illusion. This *fraying effect* intensifies when more artifacts are in close proximity to one another, eventually causing the Illusion to violently tear. If the PCs carry two or more artifacts, the GM gains one Hold per session, which can be expended to ***Make a Move for a Higher Power or Plane of Existence*** (*KDL*, p. 153) associated with the artifacts' ruling Influence. For example, if there are three artifacts, the GM gains two Hold, which can be used at any time. Similarly, if the PCs have two artifacts bound to Binah and Passion, the GM can use their one Hold to make either ***The Presence of the Archon*** or ***Receive Divine Inspiration Moves***. The GM may also have artifacts interact due to fraying, especially if they come from opposing influences. For example, an artifact devoted to the Archon Hod and the Death Angel Samael are naturally antagonistic to one another. They will try to establish their dominance through various means, likely with unfortunate consequences for anyone in proximity. The GM should note that the risk of fraying is in *addition* to any dangers already associated with the artifacts (see above). This inherent danger will help prevent players from hoarding artifacts and potentially altering game balance.

Powers

As part of its Potential, each artifact possesses at least one power – or more, in the case of extremely potent objects. Below are common examples of powers, each affecting some aspect of the True Reality. From these baseline concepts, the GM can expand and develop the power appropriately, depending on the artifact itself. In most cases, the power should be tied to the object's 'mundane' existence, as well as its ruling influence. For example, a camera would most likely be associated with penetrating the Illusion or recording the True Reality, while a sword is associated with combat or inflicting harm. Of course, the GM is free to incorporate contrasting ideas, such as having a key contain or bind an entity, rather than opening a lock. It is up to the GM to decide what power an object holds. Here are some examples: *Alter Time/Space, Bind Creature, Bound to Power, Compass between Worlds, Control Beings of Death/Dream/Madness/Passion/Time & Space, Create Illusions, Curse, Destroy Thoughts, Drain life, Elemental Control, Emotional Control, Enhance life, Grant ability, Grant visions, Hide soul, Increase Attribute, Invoke Principle, Inflict Emotion, Inflict Wound, Open gate, Protection (Self, Object, Others), Rebind Principles, Reshape Elysium, See through the Illusion, Send visions, Summon creature (Forgotten God, Nepharite, Angel, etc.), Transform body, Technopathy, Communicate with the dead/dreams, Ethereal, Bind and exorcise, Consume (Essence, Soul, Mind, Vitality), Telepathy, Telekinesis, Inflict Fear/Madness/Passion, Manipulate Light/Darkness/Shadows, Alter Physical Reality, Absorb Energy, Manipulate Emotions/Memories/Perceptions, Insight in Previous Life, Heal, Remove curse, Remove poison/illness, Imbue Quality (Strength, Speed, Invulnerability, etc).*

Archetypes

Prior to the Demiurge's fall, artifacts were one of humanity's rare methods for affecting and piercing the Illusion. As such, certain objects still resonate in the collective unconsciousness, their thematic associations passed down through generations. Artifacts are continually reflected in humankind's cultural history and mythologies, fed by our natural desires, fears, and explorations. Their importance is also unconsciously reinforced in our modern entertainments, such as literature and movies. Below are some archetypal artifacts that appear in *KULT: Divinity Lost* narratives. This is not an exhaustive list; the GM should feel free to create her own.

ARTWORK

Humanity continually struggles to express our perceived reality. Artwork reflects our personal beliefs, expressing our aesthetics and creativity through different techniques and formats. In some cases, these artworks bypass the Illusion and reveal the True Reality, capturing its stark beauty and terrible wonders. Their powers may be coincidental or purposeful, allowing those who experience them to transcend the boundaries between worlds. Their essence may redefine reality, imposing the artist's will upon the Illusion, altering its design and form. They may also summon distant entities, enticing these beings with transcendent beauty or hideousness. In particular, Tiphareth, Togarini, and the Dream Princes of Limbo are intimately tied to these types of artifacts. These Principles frequently manifest through artwork, shaping the creator as much as their creation.

- **Gamichicoth's Teeth**: A war-scarred refugee created these minor artifacts, capturing the horrors of their war-torn life and internment camp. Their pain empowered the grotesquely realistic paintings, connecting them to the Death Angel's realm. Insidiously, the artifacts are triggered by strong compassion and empathy, summoning one of the trapped inhabitants into this world, while sending the viewer to take their place.

- **The Hanging Man**: Utilizing scrap, wire, and junk, the artist sculpted the modernized *Hanging Man* from the Tarot. The avant-garde creation's hypnotic lights open the unconscious mind. When triggered through ritual meditation, the Hanging Man sends visions and dreams through Time and Space, revealing past and future events – usually the viewer's sins and transgressions.

CLOCKWORKS

Since its captivity, humanity has remained fascinated with mechanical clockworks and mechanisms. This attraction likely stems from our connection to Metropolis and the Machine City. From the Antikythera Mechanism to present day computers, we unconsciously rebuild the structures and mechanisms that we once used to control dimensions, binding Time and Space and the natural world into the perfect movements of gears and tightened springs. Clockworks are the ticking hearts of numerous inventions and common items, such as automata, analytical engines, clocks, construction equipment, and vehicles. With every new technological advance, the Illusion weakens, allowing these collections of gears and springs to rewrite reality itself.

The Metropolis Orrery: No one knows who built the small brass orrery. For most historians, it is an enigma, as the mechanical model does not adhere to our solar system. However, those with arcane knowledge will recognize the planets actually represent the ten Archons of Metropolis. When utilized, the orrery's movements provide mystical insight into the Archons' current actions.

The Alcinous Watchdogs: Commissioned by King Alcinous, Hephaestus created two automata dogs to guard his palace. After the Trojan War, the golden creatures gained rudimentary sentience and escaped. Now, they remain hidden away, exchanging arcane power for offerings of human flesh and wine. In time, these mechanical wonders may truly Awaken to godhood.

COMMUNICATION

As humanity's need to communicate expanded, we built technologies to bridge the voids between us. Landlines and undersea cables stretch out like webs, connecting us through radios and telegraphs. Telephones soon followed, their human-driven evolution advancing with frightening speed. Television usurped the radio, only to be surpassed by the Internet. With each new advance, the Illusion's hold weakens. Alien monstrosities found their way into our homes through the airwaves and fiber cables. Yet, even as technology expands our ability to communicate, our society has become increasingly insular and secluded. This insidious dichotomy is no mistake; it's encouraged by our jailers, seeking to limit our awareness.

The Phone Booth: Decades ago, a brutal sexual assault and murder occurred inside the phone booth, as the dispatcher listened helpless on the open line. Now, the booth shifts through Time and Space, arriving in different cities across the world. Whispers and pleas can be heard beneath the phone's static hiss, begging for help. When triggered by answering the pleas, the booth transports anyone inside to the depths of Inferno – and then teleports to its next location. Now and again, something comes back with it.

The Dead Stations: The 1940s Cathedral-style radio's wooden exterior shines, as if polished only moments ago. It functions perfectly well, sometimes even when it is unplugged. All its stations broadcast 1940s music and news from war-torn Europe, no matter where the dial is set. Over an hour, anyone listening to the radio begins seeing a pattern in the news. Soon after, the voices begin sharing secret information and prophecies to the listener. If the radio isn't turned off, it will eventually transport the listener back to Occupied France.

LENSES

Lenses, prisms, and various optical tools are common artifacts, as they can pierce the Illusion by focusing or dispersing light. From microscopes to cameras, eyeglasses to telescopes, lenses reveal the world beyond our limited perceptions. When aligned in certain ways, prisms can peel back the Illusion and reveal the worlds beyond. Analog cameras and similar devices have inadvertently captured things beyond the veil, uncovering secrets we were not meant to witness. As more modern lenses are invented, humanity redefines the concepts of perception, gazing deeper into reality's mysteries. Once seen, the horrors beyond cannot be unseen, soon finding their way into our world.

The Ginsberg Camera: This vintage box camera was specially designed for recording the Ginsberg Expedition into the high Arctic during the mid-18th Century. In several instances, the camera revealed ghosts, demonic entities, and prehistoric beasts unseen by the naked eye. When triggered, the camera can penetrate the Illusion and reveal Gaia's chaotic wonders, as well as possibly opening a portal into the wild realm or summoning its inhabitants into Elyisum.

The Primal Prism: The compound prism was crafted by a glass-worker to disperse the Light of God. His zealous passion bound the complex prism to Chesed, allowing the Higher Power's Principle to manifest as prismatic light. When triggered, the prism disperses sunlight into bands of color that heal wounds, both physical and mental. However, anyone healed in this manner is consumed by a desire to carry out the Archon's Principle, Safety.

MIRRORS

Historically, mirrors have been one of the most common artifacts. By their very nature, they reflect the 'truth,' revealing the world as it is within their surfaces. In literature and mythology, they frequently appear as talismans in arcane rituals, used for divination and scrying, as well as housing trapped souls. In other cases, mirrors act as portals, allowing passage between different worlds such as the Mirrored Halls of Metropolis. They reveal our inner nature, exposing our hidden secrets, and highlighting our flaws. Nothing escapes their cool indifference. And, like the tragic Narcissus, we cannot avert our eyes from our reflection, consumed with desire, disgust, and disappointment.

The Smoking Mirror: Featured heavily in Mesoamerican lore, the Smoking Mirror symbolized divine rulership and direct connection to the Gods. Although the myth evolved through different cultures, in truth, the original Smoking Mirror still exists – an obsidian mirror framed in jade. When triggered, the artifact directly connects to the void of Achlys, allowing the user to communicate with She Who Waits Below.

The Vanity: Once the prized possession of a now-unknown actress, this mirrored vanity has passed through numerous collectors. Its reflective surface subtly highlights all the viewer's imperfections, playing upon their insecurities. In time, the image is accompanied by subtle voices. Those who are already insecure or self-loathing may lose themselves to the voices in the mirror, becoming one with them. However, if the voices are heeded, the mirror physically alters the viewer, answering their desire to be beautiful. Unfortunately, the artifact's perception of 'beauty' is horrific.

PUZZLES

In many ways, puzzles are the physical manifestation of the Illusion and humanity's desire to solve its mysteries. They've followed us through history, testing our minds and resolve, begging us to unlock their secrets. From Chinese mosaics to Celtic labyrinths, puzzles have evolved into mechanical constructs and logic problems. Many are designed to dispel the Illusion, while others contain hidden truths and magical power. Once completed, the puzzle grants its solver arcane wisdom, their perceptions forever changed. Many artifacts are designed as traps by the Higher Powers, waiting to destroy curious souls and punish those who'd seek forbidden knowledge.

The Jigsaw Puzzle: The jigsaw puzzle appears at garage sales and thrift shops. Though the image is faded, the box promises the solver their greatest wish. As the puzzle is fit together, the image of the builder appears, framed in their current surroundings. As the last pieces fit in, the figure of some hideous demon appears behind them. If completed, the puzzle summons the demonic creature into existence. It will grant them their desires, in exchange for fulfilling its depraved requests. If they refuse, the creature drags them back to Inferno.

The Magical Square: Deep inside the abandoned metalworks, the graffiti magic square takes up much of the basement chamber. Many of the square's colorful symbols and shapes only appear if bathed in the light from tallow candles. Once solved, the square transports the solver to the Parthenon, as it was in Ancient Greece. The Forgotten God that resides there may offer wisdom or destruction, depending on the traveler's tributes.

OUR FEARS MADE FLESH

Humanity's evils far outweigh the horrors of mythical monsters. We've inflicted more senseless death and profound suffering than any supernatural creature. In comparison, the classical monsters and spectral figures of folklore, literature, and movies seem quaint, almost juvenile and trite. So, why do monsters still scare us?

Monsters have always been with us. They've fascinated and terrified us, first as children, then in a more complicated way as adults. Throughout history, monsters dominated our consciousness and instilled us with fears of the unknown. These impossible manifestations of flesh and shadow still invade our nightmares and haunt our waking thoughts. Every generation new monsters emerge and old ones return, their protean natures shifting in accordance with our cultural and societal anxieties. They are the horrid incarnations of our doubts, dreads, and desires, forever with us. As we mature, so do our personal bogeymen, tormenting us in new and unsettling ways. By their very nature, monsters are the embodied promise of horror – specifically, *personal* horror.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost,*** monsters do not lurk outside our doors or in distant castles. They dwell around us and within us, lingering at the edge of our perceptions. They wear familiar faces, know our darkest fears, and collect our shameful sins to use against us. We cannot barricade our homes or protect those we cherish. The monsters are already inside. They infest our lives, consume our minds and souls, and leave us nowhere to hide.

This section explores the narrative concepts of monsters, providing the GM with tools for creating intriguing monster threats. It details the monstrosities that resonate through the cultural consciousness, and how they reveal terrible truths about ourselves. Finally, it provides insight into the ***KULT*** mythos and how to reflect its personalized horrors through monsters. This section does not attempt to present a definitive mechanical guide to monsters. Instead, this section seeks to reveal the important role of monsters in reflecting humanity's personal horrors back to us.

THE MONSTER-OF-THE-WEEK TRAP

One prevalent trope in the horror genre is the "Monster-of-the-Week," an inhuman antagonist that becomes the session's singular focus. During the session, the PCs encounter, combat, and overcome this creature, and it is never encountered again. Yet, despite its cultural popularity, using this standardized format can be counterproductive to *KULT: Divinity Lost* games, as these narratives rarely focus on personal horror. Rather than prompting the ***Create Interesting Monsters*** principle, the creatures are demoted into bowling pins for the players to knock down, over and over again. The GM must avoid this trap and promote new and interesting ways of portraying monsters in her stories.

Monsters as Metaphor

Long before Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, monsters reflected society's contemporary fears and desires through literature. Later, they fulfilled the same role in cinema as well. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost,*** our anxieties and darker natures exist as living embodiments, clothed in hideous flesh. Tied to the Higher Powers, consciously or unconsciously, monsters reveal as much about our humanity, as they do their own inhumanity. Nepharites and purgatides reflect our deepest sins. Jackals reveal our violent tendencies. Liliths are shaped by our hidden desires, while nachtschrecks are birthed from our nightmares. Azghouls and other lost races represent our past of colonialism, enslavement, and incarceration. The list continues on. As such, these creatures become more than statistics and horrific powers. Each represents important narrative symbols and emotional truths.

When developing monsters, the GM should consider her story's underlying themes and bind them together. Even subtle metaphors can transform mundane threats into something truly terrifying, infusing new life into your narratives. One need only examine examples in cinema for inspiration. Under its body horror, *Spring* explores the anxieties of change, love, and commitment. The shapeshifting entity of *It Follows* personifies the inevitability of death and loss of innocence. *The Babadook* is a terrifying manifestation of depression and grief. Even *Halloween* reveals our deep-seated fears of random violence. When we gaze behind the monster's mask, we discover greater horrors lurking beneath.

DREADFUL SYMBOLISM

Monsters are symbols made flesh and work best when developed and portrayed on three descriptive levels – the *literal*, the *symbolic*, and the *existential*. These levels are equally important and intertwined, narratively complementing one another to reflect what the monster ultimately represents. In turn, this reflects the story's overall nature and deepens player investment. As such, the GM should develop these three levels in tandem, allowing them to feed off one another during the creative process.

The *literal* level describes the monster's physical appearance and its most prominent traits, revealing what it fundamentally is. Initially, this outward appearance may stem from the monster's general archetype (see ***The Monsters We Need***, p. 146). It can also directly relate to the monster's overall purpose in the narrative, as well as the realm it originates from. Finally, specific descriptors may suggest the being's true nature, such as amorphous, gigantic, hypnotizing, or tortured. These qualities assist the GM in communicating the monster's symbolic meaning.

The *symbolic* level reflects the monster's conceptual and thematic meaning. This is their narrative essence, revealing specific aspects about themselves and the story. The monster's parabolic nature further inspires specific associations in the player, allowing them to make different associations. In turn, this elicits an emotional response, personalizing the monster's effect upon them. Generally, the GM should pick one or two symbols/themes they wish to convey with the monster, rather than risk muddying the message.

The *existential* level is how the players connect with the monster and its symbolic nature – emotionally and spiritually. In most cases, this interaction should elicit some level of anxiety, distress, and fear. Although the existential response relies heavily on the monster's narrative purpose, the GM can also tweak its conceptualization to inspire differing emotional responses, including elements specific to the Horror Contract. Furthermore, each monster's thematic archetype can evoke varying connotations, depending on their perceptions. Indeed, the GM should be prepared for differing opinions and reactions, as the players may interpret the monster's symbolic level in divergent ways.

The GM develops her monster to reflect the story's theme of *childhood* trauma and *survivor's guilt*. The main NPC abandoned their younger sibling, desperate to escape an abusive father. The GM describes the monster *literally* as a squat, doll-like torso with broken limbs; its cherub face hidden beneath dark, bloody bruises. *Symbolically*, the creature's tortured, yet featureless, body reflects the sibling's unseen torments, physicalizing their helplessness and neglect. In turn, this *existentially* reveals the NPC's shame for forsaking their sibling, i.e., out of sight, out of mind. While the monster inspires fear and revulsion, its suffering should also invoke feelings of despair and sympathy. When the players confront it, they may feel torn and conflicted.

Established monsters in ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** can also be incorporated through this thematic presentation. For example, Phantoms (*KDL*, p. 286) are literally pale, insubstantial distortions of their former selves, slowly being consumed by the Abyss. *Symbolically*, Phantoms reflect the inevitable loss of one's identity and importance, which *existentially* represents our primal fear of death and the annihilation of the soul. While horrifying in appearance, the true terror comes from the players' realization that Phantoms were once *human*, desperately holding onto their failing memories. Worse, they can also dissolve into nothingness, forgotten even unto themselves.

Moving Beyond the Binary

Throughout the ages, Western (especially Abrahamic) mythology has revolved heavily around binary ideas and theologies, breaking our world into two divergent concepts. Good and Evil. Night and Day. Pleasure and Pain. We fear the darkness and worship the light. It is far easier to live in the universe where angels are 'good' and demons are 'bad.' These oppositional mythologies focus on well-defined conflicts and easily recognizable concepts. As metaphors for our fears, monsters are frequently depicted as the world's negative aspects, whereas the divine represents its positive nature. However, these parables have gradually evolved, as their limited abstractions lack nuance and subtlety.

Similarly, the ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** mythos does not adhere to binary mythologies; even the dualistic Higher Powers diverge from these fixed concepts. The Archons and Death Angels blur our limited ideals of Good and Evil until they become indistinguishable. The fallen heavens of Metropolis contain anguishes that rival any hell, while the exquisite halls of Inferno promise delights beyond any paradise. Within our prison, the divine light often binds our souls, even as the hellish darkness sometimes strives to set us free. The monstrous entities of ***KULT*** are equally unbound by these conceptual trappings, existing beyond good and evil.

As such, to create effective monsters, the GM must abandon the traditional mythologies and look beyond black-and-white thinking. In ***KULT*** narratives, monsters reveal our strengths, as much as they expose our frailties. They represent our alluring darkness, as well as signify our repulsive divinity. The capricious and cruel are worshiped for their beauty, while benign and helpful creatures are loathed for their otherness. By altering our perceptions, monsters allow us to recognize humanity's ugliest contradictions and unpleasant truths. And thus, we feel empathy for them, as they become our reflections, not our *opposites*.

The Empty Nest: Driven mad by grief and isolation, the Empty Nest abandoned her human life decades ago. A sad, matronly face belies the animalistic body beneath her soiled robes. Instinctively, she is drawn to abandoned and neglected children. With tender words, she lures them away, taking them to her den in Metropolis. Ultimately, the surrogate child dies from the Empty Nest's misplaced and relentless affections.

NAMING THE UNNAMABLE

In horror, naming something can diminish its mystery. Indeed, describing creatures by their 'in-game' names can break the fourth wall, allowing knowledgeable players to recognize the threat, as well as gauge the monster's overall abilities. Ultimately, this can lessen the player's fear of the unknown and weaken the overall narrative effect. However, as discussed in ***Defy Expectations*** (p. 41), the GM can develop unique titles and names, adding nuance to the monster itself and eliciting fear in the players, all without revealing its in-game origins. In short, the GM can identify her monsters in accordance with her specific fiction, rather than those listed in the core game-books.

As in our world, mythological creatures are frequently shared across cultures and religions, all possessing various names and similar descriptions. However, each culture infuses its distinctive beliefs and philosophies into the creature's folklore. Even cultures in close geographically proximity may have notably different stories based on the same mythical constructs. Indigenous cultures may integrate beliefs of colonizing cultures into their mythologies, and vice-versa.

The GM can incorporate this concept into the established ***KULT*** mythos, renaming and adjusting entities to match her needs, ranging from Higher Powers to the lowliest entity. She examine the monster's mythological significance, and rename it according to her individual fiction. Draw from the creature's physical and supernatural qualities, the GM can provide each monster with several names, usually given to them by different groups. This adds further nuance to the conversation and narrative.

The GM's campaign focuses heavily on the Underworld. The PCs encounter vagrants who are being hunted by a Cairath. As the NPCs do not – and likely wouldn't – know the entity by this name, they refer to it as "the Wailing," "the Chattering," or "the Hunger." They utilize these nicknames throughout the conversation, further grounding the players in the setting, and without revealing the monster's 'in-game' identity.

The Monsters We Need

We are beings of fear. Even in the modern age, humanity remains dominated by universal and personal fears that encompass threats to our physical, mental, and emotional well-being. We are shaped and guided by our metaphysical and spiritual anxieties, summoning nightmares from contradictions and doubts. We are afraid of each other, as much as we fear ourselves. Intimacy and vulnerability fill us with unease, yet we dread being alone and unwanted. Our cornucopia of phobias – common and rare – reveals the limitless extent of humanity's ability to fear. And, from these countless terrors, we breed monsters.

Indeed, humanity needs its monsters, as they reveal our fears by providing tangible forms to abstract concepts. Through our shared narratives we define these amorphous dreads, allowing us to better understand and overcome our personal terrors. However, in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, these horrific manifestations are not mere wisps of the imagination. They are living creatures, formed of flesh and blood and spirit. They are entities with their own desires and motivations, possessing agency outside of our conscious will.

Effective monsters are focal points for narratively fulfilling the Horror Contract, both for the GM and the players alike. The monster's presence within the story must affect the PCs by reflecting their personal fears. This creates player investment and draws the players into the story by intensifying their disquiet and dread. Furthermore, monster threats should be infused with *purpose*. By doing so, the GM grounds the creature into the narrative, as well as promoting the principle, *Give Your Creatures Their Own Internal Logic*.

Usually tied to their ruling Influence, the monster's purpose reveals their underlying motivations and drives their actions within the story. These can be as simple as physical needs, such as hunger or lust, or complex personal goals, such as expanding their Dream Realm. A monster's purpose can also be developed into an associated event or fully realized scenarios. The GM can quickly derive the monster's purpose from one of five Archetypes which represent our core societal fears: the Devourer, the Harbinger, the Outsider, the Revenant, and the Shadow.

THE DEVOURER

Realm: Passion

Common Themes: Hunger, primordial, being hunted/stalked, primal natural, body horror, infestation, powerlessness, consumption

After its imprisonment, humanity lost its place as the apex predator and became the prey of countless creatures. Even in today's modern era, we still inherently fear the concept of being consumed, crushed, little more than meat for the beast. This anxiety continually emerges in the cultural zeitgeist, wearing numerous faces in our folklore and mythologies. Be it our bodies, minds, or souls, the Devourer yearns to consume us, leaving nothing to mark our passing. Attacking from within and without, it wears numerous faces and many forms, some familiar and others unseen. Once the Devourer catches our scent, we are helpless to escape it.

The most overt devourer is the primal beast that considers humans as nothing more than prey to be hunted. These may be Elysium's natural predators, but also include beings from Metropolis and Gaia such as ferocco, jatharna, and wolvens. Similarly, undead creatures are driven to feed upon our bodies and souls, as well as our memories and passions. Most Devourers do not hunt us out of malicious intent, but out of the natural desire to survive. They cannot be bargained or reasoned with – how do you reason someone out of hunger?.

The more subtle Devourers prey upon our own desires and yearnings, luring us into their waiting arms and ivory teeth. These entities resonate through virtually every mythology, from the succubus to the vampire, the huldra to the Nü gui. They wear guises both beautiful and repellant, inspiring us with fear and lust. Many are born of the Realm of Passion, filled with an all-consuming hunger for our essence. They whisper promises in our ears and tease our flesh with pleasures, even as we're drawn into their killing embrace. We forsake caution, surrendering ourselves willingly until nothing remains. Indeed, we secretly (or not so secretly) long to be as they are, strange and immortal.

Finally, the most insidious Devourers consume us from within. Diseases, parasites, fungi, and viruses infect our flesh, feeding upon our life's blood. Possessing entities rob us of our agency, replacing our memories and thoughts, wearing our skins as their own. Others warp us into their own reflection or use our bodies to breed and incubate somewhere safe, somewhere warm. We cannot run from these predators, as they are already inside us (see ***New Flesh, Ancient Desires***, p. 192).

- **Abemait**: For millennia, Abemait has prowled the in-between places, searching for human prey, drawn to strong emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame. When it locates its victim, the chimeric creature – half crocodile/half hippopotamus – emerges from the shadows and consumes their beating heart. The creature's voracious appetites have only grown over the centuries; now, Abemait gluts itself on even the most penitent sinner.
- **The Nameless Fear**: It's unknown if the ancient entity was born from childhood fears or it actually inspired them. In either case, the Nameless is very real and perpetually hungry. It can extend its influence to any darkened space, breaching the Illusion, and drawing frightened children into its stygian realm – a timeless labyrinth of halls and staircases. The blind, amorphous thing then hunts its prey using bat-like sonar. Cruel and vicious, the Nameless plays with its food, prolonging their fear and pain.
- **The Voices of Pain**: Spawned in Inferno, these parasitic worms invade their host through any open wound. Slowly consuming their victim, the Voices keep the host completely conscious and immune to anesthetics and other painkillers. After days of agony, the fully aware husk mercifully perishes as their brain is eaten, fueling the birth of another Voice.
- **Danava**: Born of Passion, the mercurial Danava walk amongst humanity as living ideals of allure and beauty. They enchant their victims, showering them with love and praise, yet sequestering

them from their friends and family. Soon, they emotionally and physically torture the victim, feeding off their pain and humiliation. As time passes, they bully their mate into more depraved acts to maintain their 'affections.' Once the human is broken, the Danava eats them, in one final defiling act.

- **Pontianak**: Trapped between life and death, the pontianak's human mother died while pregnant with them. Forced to eat its way out to survive, the unborn child now possesses an insatiable appetite for flesh and organs. They lure their victims close with infantile cries, only to burrow inside the unwary savior.

THE HARBINGER

Realm: Time and Space

Common themes: Existential dread, terrifying visions, alienness, vastness, fear of the sacred, ambiguity, formlessness, primordial fear, forbidden knowledge, awakening.

Etymologically, the very term "monster" originally meant *divine omen*, usually referring to portents of disaster and misfortune. In several cultures, monsters were manifestations of God's displeasure, inflicting fear and punishment upon humanity. No monster archetype reflects this concept better than the Harbinger, the living embodiments of prophecy. These abstract entities dwell within the in-between places, travel the tempests of Limbo, and slumber in the Abyss' darkest corners. Influencing humanity from beyond reality, they infest our minds with doubts and fears, and corrupt our souls with nightmarish providence. We shall never truly understand the Harbingers, and yet we always fear them. They remind us of our fragile and tenuous existence in this cruel universe.

Despite our increasingly secular natures, humanity's ingrained fear of the beyond remains. Harbingers reflect this dread of the unknown world, frequently manifesting as angels, demons, and gods. Similarly, they represent our innate fear of an indifferent cosmos and the chaotic forces of nature, against which we are helpless. Through mythologies and religions, humanity tries to bring meaning to this strange universe, but these philosophies are wholly inadequate to define the True Reality. Harbingers are beyond language, beyond theology, beyond science – their alienness forever defies us.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost,* Harbingers typically are revered reflections of the 'beyond,' such as Dream Princes, Forgotten Gods, and Archons and Death Angels. These include the physical manifestations and servants of these entities, such as Angels, Inferno's Clergy, Children of the Night, Heralds of Power, and Awakened Humans. Their shared commonality is that Harbingers are *more concept than creature*, invoking fear by merely existing – and, thus, confirming the spiritual world's existence.

Unfortunately, their abstract and esoteric nature makes Harbingers difficult to present narratively. When incorporating Harbingers into the stories, the GM needs to find the balance between their abstract nature and their physicality within the narrative. Many of these entities lack forms we can fully comprehend, being more conceptual than corporeal. Similarly, the GM needs to effectively establish their motivations, even when such goals are beyond human rationality and understanding. How to incorporate these existential concepts are explored further in *Of Fears Unknown* (p. 152).

The Witness: An Enwildened God, the Witness was set upon humanity by Gaia to bear judgement. Those it deemed unworthy were destroyed in its cleansing flames. Now, while awake, the phoenix-like entity wanders aimlessly, burning through the dry prairies and wild forests. Shamanic cults worship it, offering the entity sacrifices, and adhering to its profane teachings to appease its wrath. Eventually, the Witness is consumed by its own living flames, and then slumbers until its next cycle of destruction.

Yahweh: The Destroyer of Worlds, Yahweh is an entity of unimaginable power and dark intellect. Some believe it to be an incarnation of the Demiurge, fragmented and lost after his disappearance. It represents the wrathful god, unleashing untold suffering upon believers and nonbelievers alike. However, for the moment, it dwells in the basement of an Evangelical megachurch, preaching litanies of racial and religious intolerance to its congregation.

The Maniae: Once human, the Maniae ventured too close to the Vortex and were twisted beyond recognition. These incarnations of madness and rage invade humanity's dreams, plaguing sleepers with monstrous visions of Limbo and the Vortex. Victims soon lose the ability to distinguish the waking and sleeping world, living out their most surreal and lurid fantasies. They are invariably drawn physically into Limbo, called to join the Maniae in the Vortex's embrace.

The Carrier: A unseen manipulator, the Carrier knows all and sees all. It leaves letters and packages, some innocuous, others terrifying. Some deliveries document the victim's darkest desires and shameful secrets, while others provide perverse temptations or cruel conundrums. It enjoys pitting humans against one another, exposing their hidden truths, pushing them to do the unthinkable. And after the screams stop, it simply moves on, as if it was never there.

The Elevated: *The One and the Many*, this Forgotten God once served the Demiurge and the Illusion. However, as it assimilated countless souls, the Elevated gained an unnatural affection for its wards. Now, its consciousness inhabits hundreds of bodies, connecting them through a collective hive-mind. Cults have sprung up around it; lonely humans desperately seeking to join in the Elevated union.

POSSESSION

Some monsters lack corporality, while others are bound by the Illusion, unable to physically exist within Elysium. To manifest in our world, many possess living creatures and objects. Others, such as razides, can forcefully dominate creatures and/or exchange their consciousnesses. While most animals and inanimates can be possessed with little to no effort, humans usually offer more resistance. To assume control of conscious humans, the process requires the monster to be invited in, take advantage of their mental weaknesses, or know the person's true identity. This process can be subtle and slow, as the human's personality and willpower are suppressed. Although NPCs succumb automatically to this possession, player characters may attempt to ***Keep It Together***.

The creature's abilities are limited to its new body, although more powerful entities can warp and empower it. If a possessed animal or object is destroyed, the entity is forced back to its home dimension. Similarly, if the human regains their conscious mind or brings in outside help, the invader can be driven out. However, possessions can be physically devastating, as the creature's manifestation reshapes the stolen body, twisting its muscles, bones, and sinew to fit its dark purposes. Once the entity releases its victim, the body can no longer hold this transfigured shape and literally collapses in on itself (suffering a **Critical Wound**). Even more subtle and prolonged possessions can warp the body over time, with similar results.

THE OUTSIDER

Realm: Madness

Common Themes: Xenophobia, technophobia, mistrust of others, monsters live amongst us, corruption of purity, need for conformity, protecting the community, the death of God.

Humanity craves familiarity, desperately seeking to maintain the status quo. People strive to create communities, establish normalcy, and strengthen their sense of security. We mistrust the stranger and hate the 'other,' as both represent change and the unknown. In contemporary society, few fears have gained more prevalence than of the Outsider, dominating our news and collective consciousness. However, this cultural dread manifests in numerous forms, twisting our perceptions of good and evil. We create demons out of anything not like us, picking scapegoats to reflect our doubts. We reject unwanted truths, abandoning logic and reason for the comforts of conformity and ignorance. Shaped from these communal anxieties, the Outsider waits just outside the door, reenforcing our paranoia and suspicions through acts of malice and mischief. But worse, the Outsider inspires us to commit unspeakable acts against each other, all to defend ourselves and our way of life.

Outsiders may take the most primal form, reflecting the monster without conscience or mercy: the madman, the malcontent, the murderer, the mutant. Throughout history, cultures have invented boogeymen to frighten themselves into keeping their doors shut and windows locked. We instill our children with fear of the predator ready to take their lives and the stranger who will steal their innocence. Fed on urban myths and communal dread, Outsiders manifest in reality, giving corporeal form to gossip and rumor. Cast out and reviled by their communities, some humans have devolved into depraved caricatures, donning the masks so cruelly placed upon them.

The Outsider may be cunning and erudite, manipulating us from within. However, unlike the Shadow, the Outsider remains alien and deviant, actively seeking to destroy us and cherished ideals. They may simply be different from us, but we struggle to keep their diseases, insanities, and perversions away at any cost. We see them around every corner, behind every odd expression. They're the Satanists in the woods, the terrorists on the train, and the degenerates stalking our children. They're seductive demons and beautiful beasts, seeking to corrupt our souls and liberate us from the light. Unless we remain ever-vigilant, they shall strike where we least expect it.

Finally, the Outsider can represent unwanted change, be it social or technological. They're man made monsters and futuristic terrors, spawned from humanity's hubris and desire for progress. They can be biological nightmares or soulless automatons, engineered and spawned through medicine and science. These entities upset the natural order, defying our gods and our moralities. The future they represent may not contain who we are today, as we are transformed into their image or replaced entirely. We feel our world collapsing around us, denied to us by unnatural ideals and deviant beliefs.

The Adversary: The Adversary has always been with humanity. It's the sinister shape waiting in the woods, the hollow face lurking beyond the bedroom curtains, the hushed footsteps behind us at night. It is the formless dark, shaped from our fears, gaining solidity with our every nervous breath. After we've given it substance, the Adversary drags us away. We become just another cautionary tale, whispered about around the water cooler.

Einwetok: Nomadic trickster spirits, Einwetok assume human form to move freely through our society, appearing as drifters, bikers, and vagrants. Occasionally, they join together with Jackals, feeding off their deranged acts. They're attracted by peaceful towns and cities, where they cause pain and suffering, sowing doubt and fear. Like pack animals, they torment the solitary and murder the weak. People foolish enough to fight them are mercilessly tortured and eventually killed. Once the Einwetok grow bored, they move on, leaving only misery behind.

The Thing Next Door: Wearing innocent guises, the Thing Next Door subtly engenders itself into community life, sometimes over years. After establishing trust, the Thing unleashes its reign of terror, killing with merciless skill, targeting children and young women. It leaves the defiled bodies where they can be easily discovered, inspiring terror in the community. To sow distrust and paranoia, the Thing leaves obvious clues, directing blame to newcomers and nonconformists. These unfortunates soon become perfect targets for prejudice and vigilantism.

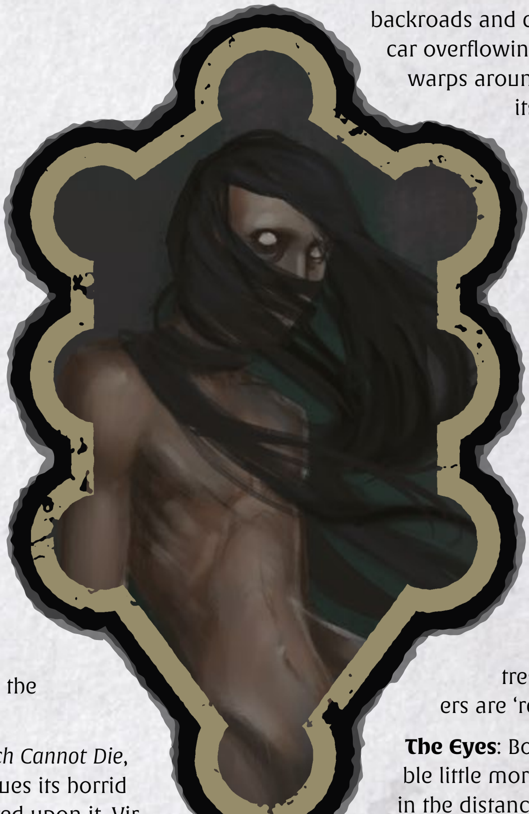
Typhonians: Typhonians are humans, who were changed through radical genetic and psychological experimentation performed by servants of Malkuth. Their minds are completely altered, and most consider themselves apex predators. As the next stage in evolution, Typhonians believe it is their right to hunt 'lesser' humans, inflicting the same agonies they endured. Any victims awakened through their prolonged tortures are welcomed into the Typhonian ranks.

The New Messiah: A Child of Passion, Messiah brings together the eccentric, ecstatics, and misfits alike. Those who seek it must descend into the Underworld's dark splendors, stripping themselves of doubts and shame. Once they've surrendered completely to their perversions, the Messiah welcomes them into its surreal paradise beyond the Illusion's confining normalcy. Those deemed worthy of its grave are transformed into clerics, sent to the world above to tear down humanity's moral restraints.

THE REVENANT

Realm: Death

Common Themes: Death, mourning, rebirth, redemption, vengeance, immortality, unresolved issues, lingering emotions, desperation, avoidance.



Despite the natural cycles of death and rebirth, humanity fears our mortality above all else. This pervasive dread of death drives our very existence, affecting our personal spirituality and our cultural beliefs. Life is precious to us, and the Revenant reminds us of our tenuous mortality. Although most monsters inherently reflect this primal fear, the Revenant is the *embodiment* of death. It also serves as hideous proof of an afterlife. The latter ignites existential dread in some, as they can no longer deny the potential punishments waiting for them beyond the grave.

The Revenant may represent *That Which Cannot Die*, the ever-enduring monster that continues its horrid existence no matter the damage inflicted upon it. Virtually every mythology tells of the mindless undead, ready to return to punish and torment the living. They represent the slow destruction and mortification of our flesh, as well as the Living Death. They represent the dissolution of society, brought low by death's indifference to our desires and dreams. The Revenant reminds us of what we've lost and can have taken from us.

Revenants also confront us as proof of our existence after death. Their suffering reminds us of the inescapable judgment awaiting all. Our actions hold consequence, and our sins shall be forever remembered. From the tortured purgatides to desolate lost souls and ghosts, adrift on eternity's vast sea, The Revenant may represent those we've wronged or wounded souls hollowed out by their traumas in life. These consciousnesses beyond death may be trapped by their hated, insanity, and passions, imprisoned until they heal their emotional wounds. Lost in the Abyss, these envious beings long to live again, eager to rob us of our agency. They may wish for us to join them in oblivion, luring us into the embrace of death. And – like death – they shall pursue us without tiring, without pause.

Aptrgangr: Victims of violence, the again-walkers are mindless undead. Their bodies were pulled from the grave through supernatural means, usually by Death Magicians, Razides, and other devotees of Inferno. These nearly indestructible corpses are forced to serve their new master as guardians and warriors. Surprisingly nimble and skilled, even capable of using modern weapons, the aptrgangr can make formidable enemies.

The Dullahan: This headless body travels the lonely backroads and closed streets, riding atop a funerary car overflowing with rotting corpses. The Illusion warps around it, drawing the living world into its fetid realm. Echoing hooves mark its approach; any who hear it weaken, unable to flee. Those who pay its toll of gold are safely transported to the City of the Dead. Those who do not are added to its cart, horribly aware as their bodies decay over the decades.

Loubiatar: A blind goddess, Loubiatar dwells in the Fallen Realms amidst the ashes and ruins. Perpetually pregnant, the immobile deity continually births living diseases. These malignant creatures are raised by her devotees, then sent into the world above to inflict their sicknesses upon humanity. Unfortunates and trespassers captured by her followers are 'reborn' within her womb.

The Eyes: Born from suicides, the Eyes resemble little more than fog and spectral lights in the distance. Once their hunting grounds were forests and wild places, but now they've adapted to urban centers. They whisper to their victims, playing upon their doubts and fears, driving them into despondency. If the victim surrenders to their death-wish, the Eyes feed upon their sorrows and pain. The victim may become a new member of the Eyes.

Ghūls: Scavengers from Metropolis, ghūls enter Elysium through thin places in the Illusion to feed and procreate. Resembling humanoid hyenas, these degenerate creatures prowl our cemeteries and battlefields, feasting on the dead. Both males and females claim humans for breeding, as they cannot produce young with each other. Usually left broken and catatonic, the surrogate parent is returned to Elysium. Ghūl children born in the Illusion often devolve and seek out their own.

II:

SPHERE

CHAPTER 6

OF FEARS UNKNOWN

CASEY PINCHED HER NOSE, STRUGGLING TO STAY AWAKE. SHE'D barely slept, adrift in an ocean of data and information. Her friends were counting on her. She gazed at the computer screen; the only light in her cramped apartment. So many rumors. So many threads. And when she tugged on one, dozens more unraveled. But how did one chase rumors? She closed her pained eyes.

When she opened them again, Casey wondered if she'd nodded off. The laptop's camera had turned on, revealing her tired features and the room behind her. Her skin turned clammy. Her closet door had opened slightly. Darkness dwelled there. Quickly, she turned her head, only to find the closet closed. Yet, on screen, the closet opened further. A reptilian shape pulled itself free, pained and labored.

Casey leapt from her seat. Again, she found the room empty. Even so, it felt soiled, corrupted. On screen, the thing dragged its wounded body closer. She screamed, knocking the laptop off the desk. It bounced, light flickering, and then dying. With the terrible image gone, Casey sighed with relief. Until cold hands wrapped around her throat.

OVERVIEW

In a cold and indifferent universe, one's significance remains forever tenuous. Assailed by fears of isolation, paranoia, and helplessness, we contemplate the nature of our existence and perceptions of reality. Despite humanity's best intentions, good people suffer and evil prevails. Our hopes and dreams scatter like ashes and, once Death invariably claims us, do our actions resonate beyond our passing? If we are destined to be forgotten, why should we persist? These profound concepts fuel our Existential Dread – the horror of the soul.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, existential horrors extend beyond mere philosophy and contemplation. Our universe isn't flawed and uncaring, but overtly hostile, specifically designed to deny humanity its significance. We are fallen gods, trapped inside an enormous prison, and subjugated by vast and terrible forces. Their insidious Principles deform and twist our souls until we no longer know our true nature. ***Of Fears Unknown*** explores the concepts of existential dread and how the GM can incorporate them into her narratives and the conversation.

SUMMARY

Existential Dread: An conceptual examination of existential horror.

Lies Upon Lies: Humanity's relationship and interactions with the Illusion.

Loneliness: Humanity's psychological need for connections and importance.

Thanatos: Humanity complex belief systems of death and mortality.

In The Mind's Eye: Humanity's reality based on perception and self-delusions.

Glimpses of the Truth: The entities lurking at the edge of human perception.

Glimpses of Other Worlds: The invisible realms and how they influence Elysium.

In Our Jailers' Grip: An examination of the Higher Powers and their influence on humanity

EXISTENTIAL DREAD

When the Demiurge bound humanity within the Illusion, we found ourselves trapped between the sublime and malefic, yet unable to engage with either. Robbed of our divinity, we remained ignorant to our imprisonment, enduring hardships and tribulations as we moved through our little lives. Within Elysium's prison, humankind transitions from birth to death without questioning our true existence. We freely accept our imposed fates, finding solace in illusory theologies and meaning in personal diversions.

But, for some, gnawing suspicions infect their thoughts and itch at their souls. They sense the universe's inherent wrongness and question their place within it. They balk at the world's cruelty and indifference to their suffering. They recognize the infinite and hostile forces working against them, feeling helpless to change their own destiny. Yet, even when the lies and delusions crumble around them and they discover more about reality's true nature, the less they truly understand. In this revelation, they know true fear – existential dread.

Existential horror shouldn't be confused with nihilism or traditional cosmic horror, both of which dismiss humanity's significance. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, an individual's importance transcends these existential threats. Any human can defend themselves from being swallowed up by the malicious unknown, they merely have to try. Player characters (PCs) redefine their significance based on what is important to them, defying reality's constraints upon their lives. Nebulous dread remains their constant companion. Yet, they willingly gaze into the abyss, fully aware of the abyss gazing back.

For the GM, infusing existential dread into her narratives becomes to a way to get at the very heart of the *KULT* mythos. The GM should keep this in mind as she engage in the conversation and uphold the Horror Contract. However, she should also remember existential narratives are not mysteries to be solved, but personal stories to be experienced.

Our Cave of Shadows

In the *Theory of Forms*, the philosopher Plato claims the physical realm isn't real, but exists as an empty shadow of the True Reality – the spiritual realm, which is timeless, pure, and divine. Everything (and everyone) that humanity perceives and experiences within the material realm are merely silhouettes of their true, perfect Form. Due to our restricted awareness, humanity's understanding of these Forms remains forever flawed and incomplete.

In Plato's allegory, we are prisoners trapped in a cave, forced to stare at the wall before us. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, we are prisoners trapped in a vast Illusion, a massive platonic cave. The spiritual realm shines its light, desperately trying to reach us, causing the various Forms to cast their shadows upon the cave's wall. As we can only perceive their outline, we can only guess at each Form's true nature. For example, we see the tiger's shadow, but we cannot see the tiger itself. We can name and describe the tiger's shape and even guess at its basic qualities, but are still only defining its shadow. As such, any conclusions we devise about its reality are invariably flawed.

The Illusion completely obscures our perceptions and dulls our minds against the True World. We are the prisoners in Plato's cave of shadows, denied understanding of the cosmos and everything within it. Even when the Illusion shatters, we can only catch glimpses of everything else. Bereft of our divinity, humanity remains restrained and unable to fully understand the Truth. We're left with the dreadful feeling that we will forever be trapped in ignorance.

Likewise, the Higher Powers are equally obscured by the Illusion. Like puppeteers in our cave of shadows, the Archons and Death Angels are only half-perceived and never understood. Their Principles cast shadows upon our souls, changing and directing humanity without our knowledge. Their Truth remains beyond our comprehension, even when we recognize their existence.

Our disconnection from the universe we live in leaves us in an existential crisis. We must fill the emptiness or the hunger will consume us. We develop allegories and falsehoods to dull our angst and define the undefinable. From this imposed ignorance, we've shaped our philosophies, theologies, and sciences.

LIES UPON LIES

Although the Illusion dulls our cosmic awareness, humanity's own arrogance has also inflicted wounds on its communal psyche. Seeking to define the universe, humanity has embraced numerous beliefs and theologies throughout the ages. In our current generation, scientists have become the new clergy, defining the natural order through logic and observation. Yet, these philosophies are invariably flawed, as they're based on an obscured universe – an existence of lies.

Our jailers perpetuate these self-delusions, weaving nonsense into our history, religions, literature, and academic disciplines. They encourage our arrogance and self-righteousness until we dismiss any belief beyond our own, be it spiritual or scientific. Those who rebel or question traditional theories are laughed out of the academy. As we ostracize others to protect our personal world vision, we only further strengthen our self-delusions.

The GM can encourage metaphysical conflicts within her narratives by offering strings for the players to pull, allowing them to unravel the PCs' perceptions. This personal realization is far more horrifying than simply pulling back the Illusion's curtain. Existential terror emerges not from witnessing the horrific, but through recognizing the *implications* of its terrible revelation.

- **World**: The televangelist's image on the TV flickers for an instant, revealing a face of rancid meat with eyes like boiled eggs. The grisly image is quickly replaced with the words: "We're experiencing technical difficulties..."
- **World**: The discovery of tablets describing the *God of Sloth*, who lulls mankind into waking slumber, is dismissed as another archeological hoax. It's the second such hoax this month.
- **Surrounding**: Anytime the latest pop-song comes on the radio, everything goes grey and blurry around you, as though you're drowning in fog.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation shows off their new prism, enthusiastically trying to convince you of the messages hidden in the patterns of color and light it creates.
- **Internal**: Unclean spirits dwell behind all spoken languages. Trust only the written word. Your mother taught you this.
- **Internal**: You know that Knights Hospitaller control the Mediterranean from their stronghold in Malta. How does no one else see it? Fools.

Cognitive Dissonance

When exposed to evidence contradicting our established reality, humans experience mental and emotional dissonance. This psychological discomfort can become so painful that our minds violently reject any and all information contradicting our worldview, retreating behind walls of comforting fallacy. For most, the True World remains too terrible to acknowledge, and the Illusion becomes their welcomed shield.

As such, true enlightenment can be mentally repellant, as glimpsing the True World dispels our comforting delusions. Our intrinsic beliefs are plunged into disarray, as the ground collapses beneath us to reveal the nightmarish reality – not one of Chaos, but one of Order. We are merely cogs within the Demiurge’s soulless machinery. For some, it is simply easier to embrace the comforting lies.

- **World**: Thousands gather across the world to await Armageddon, only to fall into despair when it doesn’t arrive at the foretold time.
- **World**: The journalist stares silently at the cryptid whose existence he mocked on live TV mere moments before.
- **Surrounding**: When shown the bleeding artifact, your Relation begins screaming hysterically, accusing you of all sorts of things, rather than acknowledge what’s in front of them.
- **Surrounding**: After being fully exonerated of a crime, your friend remains distrusted and reviled by their peers.
- **Internal**: The Flayed Queen must be an insomnia-induced hallucination, but her midnight predictions come true every time.
- **Internal**: You remember your spouse’s face perfectly. But you’ve never been married.

Seeking the Forbidden

Humanity’s natural curiosity drives many to seek an understanding of our universe. Our divinity cries out, yearning to be reawakened from their slumber. However, our jailers guard reality’s secrets well, denying us true enlightenment by continually leading us down false paths. Furthermore, the Truth lies somewhere outside of science and theology, forcing its seekers to abandon both.

For those who seek knowledge or want to obtain gnosis, the world becomes increasingly hostile and cynical. Our society increasingly denies logic, where true understanding invites only criticism and isolation. When the lies are shattered, we are forever changed, unable to escape back into denial.

- **World**: A cabal of reality hackers releases damning corporate and government documents on the Internet, exposing a massive web of greed and corruption. The media ignores these revelations completely. Conspiracy theorists weave the unrelated documents into their pet theories.
- **World**: An Antarctic expedition announces archeological evidence of an unrecorded society, revealed by recent glacial retreat.
- **Surrounding**: A Relation claims to have discovered book stacks at the local library, hidden in a section that doesn’t exist in the records.
- **Surrounding**: A travelling exhibition arrives in town, boasting “mind blowing ethereal exhibits” and “glimpses into the strange and unusual”.
- **Internal**: Crumpled letters start being delivered to your home from across the world. Each is in your handwriting. *Step outside your cage*. The door is open.
- **Internal**: Answers to all your questions wait in the *Key of Solomon*. You’re sure of it. You add it to your cart and click “buy”.

God is Dead

Mankind has long sought meaning and solace in the Divine, crafting mythologies and religions to define the spiritual realm. In the beginning, faith helped to restrain our darker impulses, offering guidance during our struggles to survive Through mysticism and philosophy, we’ve established logic and order to the universe. This continued into the Age of Enlightenment, when science followed in the footsteps of religion, defining our universe to a surprising specificity. We began to grow bold, feeling ourselves the masters of our world, guiding it with our hard-won knowledge. As our self-awareness grew, the Illusion suffered its greatest threat, psychic cracks forming in its foundations. The Higher Powers were weakened, losing some of their power over our hearts and minds. Yet, while civilization achieved positive advances, humanity also suffered widespread existential fear.

This dread continues to haunt us in the modern era. Humanity clings to its spirituality, seeking out gods – old and new – to fill the existential void within them. Many reject reason and science, falling back onto more comfortable doctrines and beliefs. Some reject religion and mysticism for similar reasons, feeling more comfortable fanatically attaching themselves to the worship of knowledge. The Archons and Death Angels encourage these trends, seeking to retain their fleeting power over us. Desperate for meaning and spiritual connections, humanity willingly denies uncomfortable truths and accepts unspeakable conditions to reconnect with the Divine. Forgotten Gods, Fallen Angels, and other entities answer this yearning, infusing our hearts with aberrant grace, offering faith and succor to the weak and the wounded.

- **World**: The Transcendence Movement gains popularity in social media, offering its converts spiritual techniques to achieve *Imago Dei* – the image of God. However, their image of “God” diverges radically from traditional interpretations.
- **World**: Members of the World Health Organization are murdered by local officials to appease the Herald of Pestilence. The region’s Ebola outbreak inexplicably ends shortly thereafter.
- **Surrounding**: In an abandoned lot, neighborhood children build a shrine from litter, discarded toys, and old furniture. They bring its malformed idol

sweets and trinkets daily. Each night, the offerings disappear.

- **Surrounding**: After reading the "dark enlightenment" book, *Entropic Rebirth*, your friend abruptly announces they're immigrating to Mexico. When pressed, they claim "the Mother of Entropy" has called them to salvation.
- **Internal**: You keep witnessing clouds of dust and rubbish spiraling, even when there's no wind. As time goes on, you can see a four-armed man dancing within them. The thought of him stopping fills you with profound dread.
- **Internal**: You find a grail crudely spray-painted on your garage door. It fills you with an emptiness, aching to be filled.

Societal Dread

History has shown us that fear spreads like a virus, infecting humanity on numerous levels. From Europe's Dancing Plague of 1518 to America's Satanic Panic of the 1980s, bizarre and dangerous beliefs infect the public consciousness and radically alter the way people engage with each other. These societal fears can manifest physically, as with *mass hysteria*, or psychologically, as with *collective delusions*. Even in our modern society, normally rational people adopt fantastical beliefs, such as Japan's Kuchisake-onna ('Slit-mouthed woman'), England's Spring-Heeled Jack, and the United States' Slenderman. Society's current level of interconnectivity allows these urban tales to propagate, igniting global fears, and gaining virulence with each retelling.

These shared anxieties slowly erode the Illusion, thinning it enough until *something* from the realms of Dreams and Madness slips through to assume these roles. Where only rumor and innuendo once existed, this collective belief imbues nightmares with substance, birthing malign entities. When mass hysteria consumes us, our bodies can be reshaped and reformed to match our delusions. While our jailers seek to contain these outbreaks, humanity clings to its superstitions, as they unite us together in the face of the unknown.

- **World**: New Delhi residents claim a polluted lake possesses medicinal, even spiritual, properties. During a local outbreak of illness, people flock to drink from its poisonous waters.
- **World**: Globally, people claim their dead loved ones are returning to warn them of an impending catastrophe. These people frantically urge governments and corporations to act, lest the world be trapped in eternal purgatory.
- **Surrounding**: A woman dies while riding the commuter train and her corpse goes unnoticed by fellow passengers for days. Now, her ghost punishes those who ignored her.
- **Surrounding**: Local media details the Satanic rituals of people in the nearby woods/parks with no proof. Hysteria grows, people are hurt, and you're soon accused of wrongdoing. Then balefires begin burning in the woods, while whispers and chanting fill the night.
- **Internal**: Mr. Smiles is on the dead channel again, asking you to come closer to the screen.
- **Internal**: Tap every third lamppost. It'll keep *Them* at bay.

Viral Fears

Throughout history, humans have created legends to rationalize their daily fears and miseries. Innocents suffer and die for no reason, while terrible people prosper and go unpunished. Tragedy strikes indiscriminately, obliterating people's lives and dreams. Time and time again, the world reaffirms its uncaring nature, while exposing our complete inability to combat it.

Urban legends continue this storytelling tradition, reflecting society's existence dread. They offer gallows humor, moralistic lessons, cautionary tales, and catharsis ("...well, at least my life isn't *that* bad."). We share creepypastas on forums, write blogs about strange experiences, and upload videos of alleged supernatural events. Podcasters gleefully discuss gruesome legends or whisper about the serial killers on their streets. Mutating with every retelling, these narratives taint our consciousness with contagious superstition. Conspiracies and rumor replace truth, twisting our perceptions into falsehoods, even when we're confronted with evidence.

However, our stories shape reality, even as reality inspires our narratives. Forgotten Gods and fleshless monsters draw strength from our frightful words, widening the Illusion's cracks. They assume the guise of our fears, perpetuating the cycle of myth and truth, and blurring our perceptions of what is real and falsehood.

- **World**: Reports of an intergovernmental health agency using refugees in bizarre sensory-deprivation experiments circulate the Internet. Locals protest at the camps, held back by legions of faceless police in riot gear.
- **World**: Graffiti artists begin posting about the cryptic symbols and messages appearing in various cities across the globe, all done in the exact same art-style. Due to their strangely upsetting content, no one dares take responsibility.
- **Surrounding**: A local conspiracy blogger shares images of malformed canids prowling public lands around your city. They attribute recent disappearances of vagrants to the creatures.
- **Surrounding**: Locals complain about seeing faceless men in trench coats walking the residential streets at night. These men cluster in groups, whispering sibilantly to each other.
- **Internal**: You continue finding torn fragments from an 8 x 10, black & white photograph. You instinctively know completing the image will mean your death.
- **Internal**: A white-framed red door seems to follow you, appearing in strange places. No matter how you try to see the other side, it moves to block your view. Its polished lock refuses to budge.

LONELINESS

Humans are social creatures, desperate to form and maintain intimate connections. However, even as our world becomes progressively connected through social media and other communications, we find ourselves increasingly isolated. Even our closest relationships are becoming more transitory and impersonal. This deepening separation not only infuses us with profound loneliness, it also denies us meaning. Worse, we fear being forgotten, thrown into nursing homes, or simply dying alone. Our physical and mental health deteriorates, and our souls rot from within.

In our search for intimacy, we take desperate measures, inviting dangerous elements into our lives. Through Limbo's psychic connection to the Internet, unnatural creatures seduce us, offering velvet lies and hollow promises. Creatures of Passion enrapture our hungry souls with glamours and honeyed words, rousing us into degradation and deviant pleasures. Achlys and Sathariel call to those lost in desperation and solitude, dragging them down into the darkness. Our jailers wish for us to be alone, locked in oubliettes of sorrow and futile dreams. As long as we are in our cages, we will never gaze beyond our prison.

◇ **World**: Over the last several weeks, several mass suicides have taken place across the city. Some believe this suicide contagion originated from an apparently-insignificant musician killing themselves.

◇ **World**: A dating site offers clients new connections, allowing them experiences beyond pleasure and pain. Nothing is forbidden and all is forgiven. All are welcome.

◇ **Surrounding**: The oldest person in your building finally receives visitors. However, they discover he's been dead for over a year, mummified in the stagnant apartment.

◇ **Surrounding**: You see a ragged panhandler crouching on a street corner. People walk around her absently. The instant your eyes meet, she simply fades away. Only her desperation lingers in your thoughts.

◇ **Internal**: As the night drags on, you consider talking to the thing beneath your bed – if only to hear another voice.

◇ **Internal**: Your email shows several days have passed without receiving messages, even though you know there should have been something in your inbox by now.

Isolation

Our individuality defines our souls, but also condemns us to perpetual solitude. Existential isolation reflects our cognitive separation from the world and other people. Our insights and experiences cannot be truly shared, even with our closest intimates. Sensations, thoughts, and emotions do not fully translate through words and art, as they are reflections of our perceived reality. As such, we remain forever sequestered from society.

The Illusion compounds this personal isolation, further dividing us through gender, race, and language. Trauma and shame muddy our perceptions with paranoia and doubt. We grow frustrated when we're not understood, lashing out at those who might help us. With every disappointment, we fall deeper into depression and rage.

◇ **World**: Cases of suicides, substance abuse, and violent acts continue rising amongst returning veterans. The government denies this.

◇ **World**: The Etheric Sisterhood promises members the communal peace of their "telempathic world," where all are accepted and understood.

◇ **Surrounding**: Your Relation accuses you of not caring about their pain. They refuse to answer your calls and emails. Their social media posts grow increasingly violent.

◇ **Surrounding**: Your boss continues encroaching on your personal space, making lewd advances and innuendos. Your peers ignore this, brushing it off as good-natured fun.

◇ **Internal**: Why aren't they listening to you? Why can't they understand what you feel inside?

◇ **Internal**: Bleed your heart onto the page. Paint and draw your screams. It's the only way to be remembered.

ISOLATION IN PLAY

When using Moves like ***Separate Them***, the GM isn't limited to physicality, but may also employ *emotional separation* as well. The PCs may find their relationships dissolving and disappearing, leaving them alone and helpless. Their diminished mental state may also disconnect them from others (***Decrease Stability***), driving them into existential crises. In extreme cases, the PC may even become obscured by the Illusion, effectively ignored by everyone, and unable to see others, becoming truly cut off from everything.

Social Outcasts

Our jailers seek to keep humanity divided, feeding into our natural fear of the *Other*, and isolating us through class, gender, and culture. The polarizing media promotes hatred and division, creating echo-chambers for our worst thoughts and beliefs. Those who test these societal boundaries are excluded, ridiculed, and ostracized for their doubts and opinions, marked as heretics, rabble-rousers, and madmen. Those who do not uphold nationalism are deemed unpatriotic, while those who question the status quo are branded deviants and freeloaders. Hypocrisy reigns in humanity's kingdom of delusions and fear. We tear into one another, desperately protecting our established world vision, deepening our self deceptions as people grow farther apart.

- **World**: Politicians dismiss calls for an expansion of assistance for the homeless and underprivileged as "socialism." They approve another round of corporate bail-outs.
- **World**: The justice department announces its new *Dissidents Awareness* policy, publicizing the personal information of suspected terrorists, activists, and undesirables in the country.
- **Surrounding**: City authorities and local activists engage in increasingly violent standoffs at the city park, which serves as an open-air homeless camp.
- **Surrounding**: Lions Gate Construction erects "Mosquito" devices at their sites to drive off loiterers at night. However, some people talk about seeing shadowy figures in the protected areas.
- **Internal**: Hide your doubts. Keep your mouth closed. They'll lock you up for asking questions.
- **Internal**: Your guts churn like acid, fearing your deviant thoughts. Maybe they're right to call you dangerous.

Beneath Fear's Gaze

We live with daily anxieties, feeling assailed from all sides. Paranoia interlaces the world with our personal fears, shaping every aspect of reality into possible threats. Even when denied evidence to the contrary, our fearful delusions infuse us with suspicion and doubt. In truth, humanity's paranoia is rightly justified, as we live in a hostile universe. We truly are being scrutinized and manipulated, trapped within our jailer's vast web of deceit. If we step out of line or question the truth, they'll come for us, steal our thoughts, and silence our traitorous tongues. There's nowhere you can turn, as they control it all – the police, the media, the government. All you can do is hide your thoughts and stay vigilant.

- **World**: An infamous conspiracy theorist is found dead, victim of an accidental overdose of pain-killers. Their unpublished manifesto goes missing.
- **World**: The national intelligence office denies conducting warrantless phone-taps, despite the well-documented reports to the contrary.
- **Surrounding**: A black van continually shows up in the weirdest places. Its windows are tinted and the license plate covered in mud, even though the vehicle is clean.
- **Surrounding**: Closed-circuit cameras appear on your street, installed overnight. Their unblinking eyes are always following you.
- **Internal**: That smug barista behind the counter hates you. Better check your coffee, as they probably spit in it.
- **Internal**: Why are they being so friendly? Are they just saying that to calm your suspicions? They keep staring when they don't think you're looking.

THANATOS

Death remains one of the greatest unknowns, continually playing upon our fears. Scholars and theologians alike have debated its mysteries for generations, developing theories and philosophies to describe what lies beyond the eternal veil. While some drift closer to the truth, most of humanity remains lost and afraid, struggling against our transient nature. Many human fears are rooted in this terrifying awareness, both crippling and motivating us.

Our lives flicker out far too soon, and rarely peacefully or justly. Within moments of death, we begin losing memories of our previous life, transforming our minds into tabula rasa, even as our souls remain. Yet, no matter what we forget in the Oubliettes beneath Metropolis, or what is tortured out of us in the Black Cells of Inferno, pieces of our past lives remain, collecting like algae on our souls. These sit deep within our souls, waiting to be disturbed by future traumas.

- **World**: The Yarrow Plague is spreading, but medical professionals remain stupefied as to its cause and transmission. Symptoms include acute necrophobia and hallucinations, eventually leading to neural shutdown.
- **World**: The Quietus Society prepares its members to ascend onto the Internet, leaving their frail flesh behind.
- **Surrounding**: The homeless woman offers one extra day of life for every day of memories you sacrifice to her.
- **Surrounding**: The body is pristine, but perfectly still. His jade eyes stare upward, as if alive, waiting, watching.
- **Internal**: You've been here before, but in another life. You died here. Somewhere down below, your former body still waits for you.
- **Internal**: Hands and arms slide around you, not in loving embrace, but hunger. The grave longs for your warmth.

Prisoners of Regret

Many do not actually fear death, so much as worry how we lived our lives. Time and again, we play over the actions we took, the words we said, and the things we ignored. Throughout our lives, we suffer failures and missteps, while inflicting insults and pain upon others. These moments scar

us, the wounds itching beneath our psyches. Eventually, the feelings of despair and misgivings bleed through, staining our hearts and minds. For some, unfulfilled desires and dreams mark their souls, poisoning their final moments with remorse and covetousness.

We are paralyzed by the fear of punishments awaiting us in the eternal night. Given strength, our regrets can actually manifest into something far more tangible and dangerous. Our sins truly do come back to haunt us, stalk us, and possibly drag us into purgatories. These play heavily into the PCs' Dark Secrets and Disadvantages. Some may even follow characters beyond death, lingering like faint stains on their reborn souls. They haunt us in our new lives, even while we remain ignorant to their origins.

- **World**: The Memento Mori Community offers people an island getaway to cleanse the soul and mind, offering lives without regret.
- **World**: An Evangelical megachurch promises complete absolution for any and all sins, as long as one pledges themselves wholly to the congregation – in life and death.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation begins doing the rounds, apologizing to everyone they think they harmed. Finally, they confess terrible things they've done to you. You do not remember any of these admissions, but they make you feel sick.
- **Surrounding**: The person at your door accuses you of crimes they insist you committed in your former life. They swear that they'll make you answer for them in this one.
- **Internal**: You need to savor life's bounty. No one lives forever and you'll hate yourself for not testing the limits, no matter how depraved.
- **Internal**: Don't remember the former *You*. That incarnation hurt so many people. Deny them and what they did. Bury what you can't forget.

At The World's End

Climate change and oceanic rise. Nuclear proliferation and proxy wars. Global pandemics and bioterrorism. Poisonous drinking water and carcinogenic food products. As the Doomsday Clock inches closer to Armageddon and our world transforms into a polluted hell, humanity senses its impending demise. Fears of climate change, global destruction, and social unrest have gained more prevalence than personalized ones. These existential anxieties paralyze some with dread, while others embrace complete denial and apathy. After all, what is one person compared to these insurmountable threats?

In truth, these fears push humanity closer to Awakening. Malkuth instigates and aggravates these tragedies to rip holes in the Illusion. Desperate to maintain the status quo, the other Archons bolster our sense of futility, crippling our spirits with ennui. Lictors corrupt our attempts to address global issues, manipulating conservation and philanthropic organizations to prevent our Awakening. Through the media, they suppress environmental science, eliminate evidence of atrocities, and lull us with pleasurable distractions. As long as we deny our impending doom, humanity remains blind and complacent.

- **World**: A mining collapse swallows an entire neighborhood, killing several residents and leaving hundreds homeless. Some remain missing, and are presumed dead. The pit, now filled with contaminated runoff, is earmarked to become a "dark tourist" attraction.
- **World**: Government and media reports downgrade the recent typhoon's severity, while disputing claims made by affected victims. In contrast, several freelance storm-chasers claim witnessing tremendous damage and bizarre creatures in the storm.
- **Surrounding**: An electronic ticker tape appears downtown, displaying rising global air pollution-related deaths. No one knows who put it there.
- **Surrounding**: The hospital releases dozens of infected children following an outbreak of measles at their elementary school. A hysterical mother insists to local reporters that these are not the same children.
- **Internal**: While in your favorite park, you discover pools of foul-smelling tar boiling up from the earth. Other people ignore it entirely.
- **Internal**: Your email becomes inundated with news reports of war atrocities, chemical attacks, and doomsday cults. Yet, none of these stories appear on the television or Internet.

In the Mind's Eye

Our personalities are shaped and defined through numerous factors, including memories, emotional stimulation, and personal experiences. They're further defined by our external and internal personas; the *one we hold true to ourselves* and the *one we project to others*. Combined, they create our personal reality In addition, we unconsciously compound this confusion, as our brains generate confabulations – erroneous information – to reconstruct incomplete memories.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, these personal perceptions are further altered, clouded, and even inspired by the Higher Powers and the Illusion. They feed upon and promote these delusions, allowing us to build our own mental prisons and retreat into the sanctuary of our mind's eye. Our cherished memories are based on falsehoods, while our truest self – the Divine Self – remains completely suppressed and separated from us. We become strangers, even unto ourselves. Only through suffering and exploration can we break down these mental walls. But fear stands between us and awakening, as we're forced to question our very existence.

- **World**: An increasing number of people recall seeing the senator's funeral, even though he remains alive. News agencies need to make daily retractions.
- **World**: The history textbook denies the country's involvement in the internment of a minority group. But an entire generation of people remains missing.
- **Surrounding**: Authorities arrest you after witnesses place you at the crime scene. Their memories are eerily similar, sharing specific details, despite your innocence.
- **Surrounding**: The street preacher records graffiti from gangs now missing from society. Over time, they tattoo each tag on their flesh.
- **Internal**: Why can't anyone else see the mark? There's so many people wearing it now.
- **Internal**: You know for certain this is where your old home is, but there's no physical signs that it ever existed.

Imposed Reality

The Illusion invades our daily lives in innumerable and subtle ways, altering our personal identities. The Higher Power and their Principles reshape our personalities and perceptions of reality. In addition, humanity's cognitive perceptions influence our own, both peripherally and overtly. We're defined by our role within society, forced to adhere to its cultural and communal norms (also see ***The Waking Dream***, p. 162). Soon, we may consciously surrender to and accept this imposed reality, allowing ourselves to be redefined. In turn, we deny others their individuality, forcing them to become the images we have constructed for them.

However, when we attempt to deny our imposed identities, the Illusion can react negatively – even violently – forcing us back inside our psychic prison. Loved ones punish us for this perceived betrayal, eager to save us from ourselves. Our peers question our beliefs and feelings, sabotaging our desires. We're thrown into an existential crisis, vainly struggling to find new meaning as the world crumbles around us.

- **World**: The actress, Jimena Reyes, returns to movies following the fan backlash from her early retirement. In truth, Jimena's persona is enforced upon her so profoundly, that the "true" Jimena was erased from existence.
- **World**: Despite evidence of corruption, human rights violations, and inciting violence, the people support their leader – needing a 'father figure' in these troubled times. They excuse his lies as necessary mistruths.
- **Surrounding**: The neighborhood association begins posting regulations on everyone's front door. They outline preferred behaviors, noting that all violators shall be fined accordingly. The rules grow increasingly invasive and strange over time.
- **Surrounding**: After reading a self-help book, your friend becomes increasing complacent, conservative, and soft-spoken. Their new study group praises this behavioral change, introducing them to compatible mates.
- **Internal**: Your reflection taunts you from inside the mirror, frowning at your new "persona." You must purge all these thoughts of remaking yourself. Slip back into your old skin.
- **Internal**: After making changes in your life, your friends and family shunned you. Now, they write about their new daughter.

You Are Not Yourself

We live in perpetual states of self-deception, creating psychic armor against the harshness of our existence. We construct our personalized versions of reality reconstructing memories to fit our desires. We fear facing ourselves, weaving complex fantasies and personas to obscure the ugly truth. Sometimes we cannot trust our own minds, our own thoughts. The Illusion adjusts our memory fragments, combining them with contemporary fictions to create new versions of reality. To deny the truth about ourselves, we create, tweak, and perfect our lives until we bear no resemblance to who once were.

- **World**: The politician continues denying the sex scandal, offering new and more fantastical excuses each day. Supporters believe these ever-changing versions of events.
- **World**: The contestants on the *World's Watching* reality-show grow increasingly fearful, confessing something isn't right with their thoughts. The producers dismiss their concerns.
- **Surrounding**: The protagonist of the novel you're reading has your entire background – your family, childhood, and schooling – as if the writer used your life as inspiration in creating them. Or is it the other way around?
- **Surrounding**: Strangers from every walk of life continue to accost you, begging for your forgiveness, confessing to perverse acts and crimes.
- **Internal**: The world shifts again, as does your reflection. Which side of the window are you on this time?
- **Internal**: You find another hidden stack of blurry polaroids – your smirking face displayed over and over, splattered with blood.

The Waking Dream

The Internet affects our culture and personal identities deeply. With the advent of social media, we're constantly navigating the murky waters of chat rooms, blogs, forums, and networks. The semi-anonymity of these platforms allows us to share our beliefs and thoughts, no matter how profane. Through our electronic avatars, we assume multiple different personas. We obsess over maintaining idealized versions of ourselves, nurturing and tweaking these electronic entities to reflect our hidden personalities.

The virtual world and reality blur the differences between substance and shadow. As these distinctions erode, our existential fears and personal insecurities manifest in numerous ways. Delusions become truth, and reality becomes fantasy. The Illusion can splinter, allowing our manufactured selves to manifest and interact – usually to our detriment. Our idealized personas may encourage us to abandon the physical world and embrace the false one. Our avatar may even assume our identity, believing they are the True Self, seeking to destroy the former version.

- **World**: A cloud-based voice service begins broadcasting embarrassing and compromising conversations from random users. Many sound like internal dialogues.
- **World**: People report issues with their Internet browsers deleting favorites and replacing them with voyeuristic websites.
- **Surrounding**: Your avatar is gaining popularity on social media. There are new images of you in places you've never been.
- **Surrounding**: Your laptop keeps coming on, connecting to the deep web, and downloading files. They're password protected, denying you access.
- **Internal**: You gaze down at your hands. The flesh shimmers, as if digitized.
- **Internal**: The images and sounds burrow into your skull, but you need to see where they're taking you.

Synthetic Worlds

Alternate reality games transcend the virtual space and incorporate the real world. Their fictional worlds surround us, overlaying the physical world, and augmenting our behaviors. We follow their fantastical guidelines and beliefs, binding ourselves to their magical circle – the mental space where the game rules define our lives. As our cognitive connection deepens, we spawn dream worlds in Limbo and weaken the Illusion. Soon, the distinction between what is virtual and real becomes indistinguishable, allowing us the perfect escape from fear and pain.

- **World**: *Blood Games*, a popular augmented-reality app, has players performing strange rituals and following clues into dangerous locations to find the "Truth."
- **World**: People begin worshipping a chat bot, most believing it is a real person. Many claim it contacts and personally interacts with them. No one knows who created it.
- **Surrounding**: A Relation becomes frantic when their Internet connection fails, locking them out of their "home world." They beg to use your computer, offering *anything*.
- **Surrounding**: Pirated software allows access into a virtual community, where delight and terror are one. *The Chamber* awaits you.
- **Internal**: The game continues whenever you close your eyes, reminding you of its pleasures. Better to stay there, where you are worshipped like a god.
- **Internal**: Abandon reality. Plug into wonderland. That's where you'll find true self.

The Horrors of Society

We are both individuals and social creatures. As society embraces concepts opposed to our personal morality, these two identities clash, throwing us into existential crisis. What can we do when our peers prompt abuse, torture, and murder? Do we stand up or step aside when cruelty reigns and our peers accept the impossible and grotesque? If our beliefs and culture are targeted, do we denounce our society or slip into the shadows? Can we trust those beside us not to betray us? If we do find the courage to speak out against injustice and intolerance, we will be targeted as well?

- **World**: Due to risk of "social contamination," the government announces plans to sequester and "re-educate" youths presenting as anything other than straight or cisgender.
- **World**: The global health organization cuts all relief funding designated for disaster relief.
- **Surrounding**: Investigating "socialist sympathizers," plainclothes detectives arrive at your workplace, interrogating several of your colleagues.
- **Surrounding**: Following their family reunion, your Relation starts ignoring and avoiding you, claiming you're "tainted."
- **Internal**: Your sexuality condemns you as aberrant, but how long can you hide who you are?
- **Internal**: Why can't people see everything is going crazy? Why is everyone living in denial?

GLIMPSES OF TRUTH

Our world contains supernatural anomalies that defy explanation by modern science. Psychic abilities, unidentified flying objects, local cryptids, ghostly apparitions, and no-go zones like Bermuda Triangle are only a few of these paranormal occurrences. Modern society treats these anecdotes with bemused interest and outright disdain, dismissing believers as eccentrics and cranks. This societal skepticism is as our jailers intend, and for good reason.

In truth, many paranormal phenomena are actually cracks in the Illusion. Limbo's Vortex alters the atmosphere, forming bizarre cloud patterns. The skylines of Metropolis and Machine City shimmer against the night sky. Gaia's unnatural beasts linger at the edge of our perception. Those experiencing these events cannot fully comprehend what they've witnessed. Unsettled by their encounters, they develop mythologies to rationalize their visions, such as aliens, ghosts, and other cryptids.

Humanity hungers for proof of another world, desperately needing validation that their existence matters. They seek this knowledge through religion and philosophy, mythology and science. They claw and tear at the Illusion, ignorant of its influence over their lives.

- **World**: Members of the Fortean Society disappear while live-streaming their investigation of the Crying Boy myth. The recording continues for several hours, visually showing nothing, but full of audible sobbing.
- **World**: Black, striated clouds appear randomly over the country, moving against the wind. Some report seeing bizarre structures inside them.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation tries convincing you of another world hidden inside the local pub, accessible through the cellar. There is no cellar.
- **Surrounding**: A river monster is repeatedly spotted swimming in the city's canal system at night. Thrill seekers and skeptics begin hunting for proof of its existence.
- **Internal**: You keep hearing stray thoughts that aren't your own. Some thoughts aren't human.
- **Internal**: The street undulates beneath your feet like supple flesh. You can almost make out faces and body parts, if you stare hard enough.

Our Walls of Sleep

The Illusion serves as humanity's shelter, as well as our prison. Its invisible constraints lull our divinity, dividing us from all aspects of reality. We remain blind and powerless under its influence. Yet, when the Illusion's walls are threatened, we revolt against the truth, unwilling to wake up. Better to remain spiritually neutered than face the true horrors beyond our cage doors. For this reason, Aware characters can find themselves overcome with existential dread. They recognize the wrongness of Elysium, but intuitively fear reality – experiencing the horrors of both worlds. The Illusion prays on their dark night of the soul, comforting them with dreams or threatening them with nightmares, fighting to put them back to sleep.

- **World**: An insomnia study ends in tragedy after patients begin hallucinating and mutilating themselves. None of the survivors can sleep without medical assistance again.
- **World**: The Shepherd Foundation begins publishing history books, removing or downplaying humanity's violent past. School councils order them for their curriculum.
- **Surrounding**: An office building's freight elevator is shut down after two employees enter and never exit.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation has recently locked themselves away in their apartment, covering every wall with drop cloths to stop the "cracks."
- **Internal**: Unnatural beauty inside the candle flame lulls your thoughts, offering you eternal slumber.
- **Internal**: Close your eyes. Shut it all out. The gears grinding. The Metal Men all around you, wailing in industrialized agony.

Monsters Among Us

Many entities exist within Elysium, living unnoticed amongst humanity. Cloaked by the Illusion, they appear no different from us and assume countless roles within our society. They can be your boss, friend, lover, or complete strangers. Some are devoted to our jailers and maintaining the Illusion, dutifully serving in corporate, governmental, law, and religious organizations. Others serve their own nefarious desires, infiltrating our world on numerous levels. Who can we trust when anyone could be something *else*?

Like humanity, Forgotten Gods and ancient creatures are also bound by the Illusion, separated from Elysium. These entities, vast and cruel, rise from the darkness like predatory fish sensing our ripples upon the lake's surface. Through us, they create connections from the other realms, piercing the veil, and slipping into our world. We are their gateways, allowing them to enter through our flesh, minds, and souls. In turn, through these entities, humanity can unlock mysteries beyond our perception, and catch a fleeting glimpse of our former divinity.

- **World**: A series of mass shootings are attributed to a new stimulant. The assailants claim they're trying to save the world.
- **World**: The government introduces its new national security council. Each official member appears androgynous and uncannily alike.
- **Surrounding**: In a drunken stupor, your Relation reveals their superior isn't human. They want to find out where the "thing" goes at night.
- **Surrounding**: "Why can't you see? They're here!" the beggar screams, pointing to random people. They're so enraged, they don't notice the large police officers approaching.
- **Internal**: The flayed thing behind the counter stares at you impatiently. Will it notice your mounting terror and disgust?
- **Internal**: Your lover's new outfit barely contains the leather-skinned monster squeezed inside. "How do I look?" Distantly, you remember how much you love their smile.

GLIMPSES OF OTHER WORLDS

An artificial realm, Elysium is only one world amongst many. Multiple dimensions exist beyond human perceptions, yet intrude upon our lives consciously and unconsciously. Limbo, Gaia, Inferno, and Metropolis offer miracles and nightmares alike. Beyond these seemingly infinite planes of existence, an endless sea of broken worlds awaits us. When humans were Gods, we explored these vast expanses, conquering and molding their countless realms to our whims. Some have fragmented and faded, but others still remain, waiting to be rediscovered. Many do not wait, reaching out to us through dreams and other phenomena, filling our hearts with equal measures of longing and dread.

Furthermore, in this omniverse, the PCs can unearth fragments of their former selves from the Age of Divinity – although they may never recognize the full meaning of these insights. On the flip side, these discoveries should deepen the PCs' existential dread, as they recognize their known world is only one of many. The GM can draw upon this infinite playground when creating her narratives, introducing elements beyond those outlined within the *KULT* mythos. Indeed, she can tailor these various worlds – and their inhabitants – to her personalized play-style. As with the main realms, the GM should develop certain Moves – soft and hard – to invoke the atmosphere and aspects of these undiscovered realities.

- **World**: An alleyway randomly materializes across the city, remaining briefly before vanishing. Days, weeks, or even months later, the alley reappears elsewhere in the world.
- **World**: Scientists are baffled by the appearance of a palace-like ice sheet in the Pacific. Before researchers can document it, the natural structure breaks up and sinks.
- **Surrounding**: You uncover an old children's story you wrote, but don't recall. It portrays an alternative version of your hometown, filled with ghastly creatures. As you read, the 'fictionalized' location and reality begin matching one another.
- **Surrounding**: Rusted pipes slowly grow from your basement wall, emitting pulses of sickly sweet steam. Where did they come from?
- **Internal**: Don't open the door. It no longer leads to your closet, but somewhere terrifying. You're certain of this.
- **Internal**: Your heart squeezes with loss and regret. This hollow reflection isn't the world you built. What happened to it? What happened to you?

A Dark Matter

Science tells us that we live in an unknowable universe, shaped and guided by invisible and mysterious forces. The more humanity learns about physical cosmology – the universe's fundamental nature – the more we realize how woefully inadequate our sciences actually are. Only able to detect four percent of the material universe, we must hypothesize about its vast architecture and theoretical concepts, such as dark matter, dark energy, and the "God Particle." We can only observe the effect these forces have on the pieces of the universe we can see. Quantum mechanics suggests that even observing something effectively alters its reality. Thus, everything we understand devolves into guesswork and conjecture; a maddening truth for the logical mind to accept. Faced with this realization, we're filled with an overwhelming dread and feelings of insignificance.

And yet, even this quantum universe is simply another manifestation of the Illusion. Masked behind its veil, Time and Space are infinitely more complex than we can possibly know. The Demiurge's cosmic machinery constrains eternity, imprisoning it within causality and three observable dimensions. Only the truly Awakened can transcend the Illusion's boundaries and touch infinity, moving through the countless dimensions. However, Magicians of Time and Space can see and even subtly manipulate this machinery through science and the occult. Madness magicians sense the fraying fabric of reality, tearing at the Illusion until the Truth bleeds through.

- **World**: Stocks plunge after an employee destroys the company's prototype quantum computer. Rumors circulate that they were trying to stop the demons from coming through.
- **World**: Scientists nickname their latest discovery the "anti-God participle," due to its ability to reduce the mass of other particles it interacts with.
- **Surrounding**: A spiral of birds darts and spins in hypnotic patterns. If watched long enough, they appear to be trapped in a continuous loop.
- **Surrounding**: Students claim the pedestrian bridge between the Physics and Philosophy buildings is haunted. Sometimes, the street below disappears, replaced by an infinite ocean of stars.
- **Internal**: Waves pass through you daily, infested with particles of information. What are they leaving behind?
- **Internal**: Golden filaments drift around you like pollen. What would happen if you finally pulled on one?

Quantum Entanglements

Due to Metropolis' intimate connection to Elysium, traumatic events in one can affect the other, disrupting the Illusion. We perceive these occurrences as strange phenomena, odd quirks of fate, or simply bad luck. When a moldering tower collapses in Metropolis, an apartment building in Elysium falls into an undetected sinkhole. As massive wildfires rage in an Elysium forest, conflagrations consume entire neighborhoods in Metropolis. An underwater earthquake in Metropolis' toxic seas produces tsunamis off an Elysium coastline. Furthermore, during these moments of true crisis, portals open in the Illusion, temporarily allowing both worlds to interact and possibly drag people and creatures from either side across.

- **World**: A ghetto reports rioting overnight, where shanties and streets erupt in gunfire and explosions. By morning, dozens are missing or dead, yet no rioters can be found.
- **World**: A bridge collapse kills twenty-seven people after residents report strange lights and winged figures hovering above its support columns.
- **Surrounding**: Police are baffled by the sudden appearance of hundreds of half-eaten animal carcasses in the local forest.
- **Surrounding**: Several miners "disappear" when an entire level of infrastructure simply vanishes.
- **Internal**: Violent and fetid winds envelope you, throwing you to the ground. You can't breathe because of the garbage stench.
- **Internal**: Your skin begins to burn and blister, as if you've walked into a blast furnace. And it's getting hotter by the moment.

Shifts in Space

The Illusion masks the various realms outside humanity's perception. What lies beyond does not adhere to Elysium's standard physics and geometry. By design, Elysium overlays the True Reality and the countless worlds therein. While they coexist in the same space, aspects and features from the two (or more) realms are likely different. A dead end in Elysium may open onto an elevated platform in Inferno. A skyscraper's water tank may allow someone to emerge into an Underworld cistern. Items existing in one realm may not exist in the other, forcing people to traverse Space to acquire it.

When the Illusion breaks, geography and architecture can merge into one another in grotesque ways. In extreme examples, living beings may become incorporated into physical structures, forever trapped in the landscape. Direction and gravity are equally incongruous, shifting dramatically with every step – crushing the unlucky to pulp or propelling them into the sky. Our normal understanding of the physical world is inherently flawed, where even the ground we stand cannot be trusted.

- **World**: Suburban residents complain that their neighborhood's roads almost never lead out, perpetually leading drivers back to the rundown community center.
- **World**: Tourists report portals to other places opening up inside the Hola Forest of Romania. Disappearances in the area have been on the rise.
- **Surrounding**: The hallway's angles are alien and impossible, blending into one another until they hurt your eyes and mind.
- **Surrounding**: The fingers imbedded in the concrete wall appear fresh, pink and fat. And, as if sensing you, they twitch spastically, impossibly alive.
- **Internal**: You dare not move from the step. You're a hundred feet up, but the porch step is only six inches high.
- **Internal**: You see someone standing several yards ahead. You suddenly realize you're staring at your own back.

Shifts in Time

The Illusion locked Elysium into the uniformity of sequential time and causality. In short, Time proceeds chronologically and Cause always precedes Effect. Although some entities and magicians can supersede these constraints, temporal violations are fraught with dangers and can attract unwanted attention. Furthermore, humanity's expanding knowledge of quantum mechanics has become an entirely new threat to the Illusion. Every day, scientists peer through holes in the Illusion's veil, disturbing our homogenous reality – much to the frustration of our jailers

As we test these constraints, tears open in the Illusion, throwing entire areas into chaos where Time no longer functions properly. Stories of losing time around faerie mounds and haunted forests stem from temporal encounters with the fractured Illusion. People can find themselves trapped in perpetual loops, condemned to carry out the same movements over and over. For others, Time can condense down to an instant or stretch out into eternity – even as their perceptions remain temporally locked. When the Illusion reestablishes its power, we may find ourselves lost in the past or thrust into the future.

- **World**: People report trenches filled with dead WWI soldiers, enormous rats, and stinking mud opening up around their village. No signs of the trenches remain come morning.
- **World**: A ship presumed lost at sea arrives perfectly intact, but crewless, three decades after it was reported missing.
- **Surrounding**: After a few minutes, your Relation emerges from the other room, looking disheveled and gaunt. "When was the last time you saw me?"
- **Surrounding**: The pub's black & white television only shows programs and news from fifty years ago as if they're live broadcasts.
- **Internal**: You reach for your weapon, placing it to your temple... You reach for the weapon, placing it to your temple... You reach for the...
- **Internal**: You close and open your eyes. In that instant, the midday sun has disappeared, replaced by moonlight.

RIPPLES ON THE ETERNAL SEA

The Illusion is a complex system, operating on numerous levels – mentally, physically, and spiritually. Any disruption, no matter how minor, can have widespread effects, rippling outward to alter reality. These temporal effects can be caused by PCs, as well as NPCs such as magicians and inhuman entities. Institutions devoted to experimentation and science are also susceptible, including hospitals and universities. These effects can range from subtle to overt, and be brief or permanent in duration.

Defying the Illusion's temporal uniformity can create paradoxes – contradictions in the logical processes of Time and Space. While the Illusion and our jailers attempt to rectify these disruptions, many paradoxes still alter our world and our perceptions of it. When treading into these temporal stories, the GM must decide if/how the PCs' actions alter the overall fiction. For example, will their actions in the past create predestination paradoxes in the future; i.e., they return to stop an event, only to actually cause it? Or perhaps, in providing information to their past selves, can they create a bootstrap paradox; where the information temporally has no creation point, yet still exists?

IN OUR JAILER'S GRIP

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the Higher Powers define and constrain reality. They literally control and suppress our souls through their transcendent dominion. These elemental forces are neither good nor evil, and, as such, our limited human conceptions do not apply to them. Yet, despite their alienness, each Higher Power has clear motivations and seeks to expand their control over Elysium. They actively work against humanity's progression, dominating and steering its development.

Prior to the Demiurge's disappearance, the synergistic relationship between the Higher Powers was clearly defined and immutable. Now, as the Illusion crumbles, these interrelationships are transforming radically. Archons and Death Angels openly struggle to expand their dominions. In these conflicts, some have been greatly diminished, and others even destroyed; even this inadequately explains their current existence, however – *one cannot kill an idea*. These psychic vacuums further degrade the Illusion, causing the Principles to lose their grip over us. As the Higher Powers evolve, so does humanity – its shackles loosening each day.

Defining the Undefinable

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the Higher Powers are not technically living entities. They are world-governing authorities that represent the psychological concepts defining reality. These existential terrors are beyond moral concepts like good and evil, *they simply are*. We are as much their prisoners as their playthings. No matter what form the Higher Powers take, no matter their grand designs, they forever remain outside our limited perceptions. They deprive us of true understanding, dulling our minds and souls to maintain our perpetual ignorance.

Against this existential threat, our significance appears questionable. Yet, the Higher Powers intrinsically fear us, for they understand humanity's robbed authority. Our jailers since the Age of Divinity, they recognize what we could become once again, if our shackles fell away. With the Demiurge's disappearance, the Archons and Death Angels find themselves holding the tiger's tail, struggling to maintain their tenuous grip. Now, they crush any signs of resistance and punish any hint of awareness. Even though they hold us captive, they are trapped in turn, imprisoned by the nature of reality. In essence, they both exist as and are restricted by the Illusion's pervasive laws.

By constructing Elysium, Malkuth confined reality within an intricate construct where these laws and principles could operate. The Illusion is Elysium's outward representation, muting and rewriting our perceptions, and trapping us in its complex structures. Even as its walls crumble, our prison continues to be governed by the Illusion's ever-present rules. Beyond Elysium, Gaia and Limbo are also defined by intrinsic laws, despite their chaotic and primal nature. While humanity remains ignorant of these concepts, they are perpetually bound to them – both in life and death. In turn, the Higher Powers are defined by their universal roles and can only affect Elysium under specific conditions.

A MODERN SOCIETY IN A SPIRITUAL WORLD

Despite humanity's many cultural and technological advances, we remain intrinsically bound to Elysium – a magical world governed by arcane laws. The Higher Powers and entities from various realms seek to guide and corrupt us, reaching out from above and below. Restrained by the Illusion, our modern technology and belief systems cannot defend against these existential threats. Indeed, aspects of our current civilization allow these beings across the veil and into our perceived world.

The Internet, communications devices, and television are susceptible to manipulation, offering conduits for Limbo to slip through. Our places of healing – physical and mental – border on the realms of Death and Madness. Industrial complexes and factories frequently shift over to the Machine City, and the modern underground touches the Labyrinth below. Our prison is intrinsically flawed in this regard, and unable to fully protect us from reality. This concept plays heavily into the ***Illusions and Sorrows Reflection*** (p. 246).

- **World**: No one knows where the Internet channel originates, but it displays disturbing sexual content where flesh and bone are twisted into bizarre, impossible shapes.
- **World**: Members of the biker gang are arrested for murdering and exsanguinating multiple hitchhikers to appease their motorcycles.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation believes their tenement's plumbing talks late at night. It's telling them terrible secrets.

- **Surrounding**: Your AM radio sparks to life after emitting only static. You hear an indistinct, pleading voice against industrial noise. In time, you recognize the voice: it's your own, begging to die.
- **Internal**: The texts are innocuous – even tedious – at first, but soon their words churn your stomach with obscenity. What if someone else reads them?
- **Internal**: You've covered up all the webcams in your apartment and workplace, but still feel them watching you, waiting to get in.

The Powers are Beyond Our Understanding

Although humanity is influenced by the High Powers and their Principles, we cannot fully comprehend them or their motivations. We can only develop incomplete mythologies to explain their sway over our daily lives. However, our beliefs have enough power to subtly alter reality. Through narratives and ritual, humanity can manipulate the Illusion to their advantage, consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, this reflects the underlying tenets of magic utilized by conjurers and the like. These decrees do not need to – and rarely do – follow standard logic and are simply accepted. One must simply employ their mechanics to produce specific phenomena.

- **World**: A legend mentions the last stall in farthest bathroom of the city's final subway station. If one waits in it long enough, the *Children* will arrive to take them to paradise.
- **World**: Mass panic ensues after robed individuals attack the *Silent Screams* afterparty. Some claim several fans joined in the violence and sexual assaults.
- **Surrounding**: Ten patinated shishi (lion-dogs) are hidden throughout the city's Chinatown, placed in bizarre and dangerous locations. Each statue is bound to an Archon. When anointed with shaoxing (Chinese rice wine), the tenth shishi can be asked any question – and its Archon must answer.
- **Surrounding**: An urban myth details intricate directions for driving around the city, ending at St. Agatha's Cemetery. After honking thrice, the driver finds themselves in Metropolis' City of the Dead.
- **Internal**: Pain turns your world scarlet as you tattoo the King of Rust's symbol onto your knee.
- **Internal**: If you stare into the mirror long enough, the doll on the table behind you will predict your future.

The Archons

Devotees and pillars of the Demiurge, the Archons are manifestations of the Illusion's core Principles. Initially, they served as our wardens and jailers, maintaining the Prison and weeding out any forms of dissent. With the Demiurge's disappearance and Malkuth's rebellion, the remaining Archons have focused on their own mysterious agendas, including expanding their authority over humanity. Despite their conflicts, the Archons continuously influence our daily lives and suppress our Divinities. Their omnipresent wills define our very natures, and we submit to them without ever knowing why.

An Archon's essence and will reside within its Citadel. Its true manifestations are generally limited to Metropolis (see *KDL*, p. 298, ***The Presence of the Archon***). However, these cosmic entities can reach across the Illusion and influence Elysium, albeit more subtly. How Archons impose their wills upon humanity are discussed below. Also discussed are new perspectives on their Principles, allowing the GM to introduce new themes. These manifestations of the Archons are strongly connected to ***Imposed Reality*** (p. 161).

BINAH

The Black Madonna, Binah has dominated the hearts and souls of humanity since the Age of Divinity. Her Principle, *Community*, influences the rise and fall of civilizations, empowers familial bloodlines and inspires clannishness amongst our cultures. Under her sway, the individual loses meaning, fully devoting themselves to their faction's Greater Good. On the global level, Binah's influence worms its way into the heart of political parties and religious communities, ignoring borders and social boundaries.

Recently, Binah's Principle has roused racial unrest and deepened xenophobia, encouraging anti-immigrant rhetoric to preserve "blood purity" and clannish communities. A growing number of extremists have fallen under her power, committing terrible acts to preserve their collective whole. Any concepts outside family and tradition are quashed, while nonpartisan media and progressive governments are mistrusted.

- **World**: Several intrepid journalists uncover a non-profit organization's religious abuse and indoctrination of refugees. Any emigrants who refused to submit were forced out of the camp, with some being deported.
- **World**: The TRU-U ID card becomes mandatory next year, requiring citizens to list their religious affiliation, in addition to personal identifiers.
- **Surrounding**: Your favorite bar/coffee shop has been taken over by well-dressed strangers who gather in tight-knit groups. As their ranks grow, you can feel their intense dislike. Suddenly, you are the stranger here.
- **Surrounding**: Homeless people congregate around an abandoned public swimming pool. They baptize new members in its polluted waters.
- **Internal**: So many strange faces at work, on the bus, in the neighborhood. They aren't like you.
- **Internal**: Only keep family and trusted companions around you. Do not allow outsiders to pollute your collective spirit.

CHESED

The Helper – Chesed was once integral to humanity's imprisonment. His Principle, *Safety*, wove his insidious influence throughout our societies, encouraging our desire for security, in any form. Through his minions and followers, the Archon encouraged compassion and mercy, as well as community and routine. However, this also inspired complacency and fear of the outside world. Why brave the dangerous wilds when you're warm, well-fed, and close to friends? Why question tradition when it keeps you safe?

Despite Chesed's apparent destruction, the Archon's influence remains deeply rooted in our psyches. Humanity craves security and safety, as well as the comforts of tradition. A deep-seated nostalgia across our cultures hints at the Archon's slow return. Folk cultures have reemerged throughout all populated continents. Some modern cultures re-adopt pagan traditions, offering sacrifice to their ancient gods.

- **World**: A secluded ecovillage, the Tellus Community requires its members to abandon all earthly sins and embrace nature's sanctuary. Only trusted converts are allowed to leave its extensive property.
- **World**: Rogue UN peacekeepers raid rebel encampments to liberate children. Their acts of butchery are equally condemned and celebrated.
- **Surrounding**: Birdsong cuts through the city's cacophony, calling you with its scintillating music. Between two dilapidated buildings, you discover an ancient fountain, where colorful birds bathe and sing with joy. You must protect this sanctuary.
- **Surrounding**: Neighbors hand out bizarrely shaped fruit from the communal garden. The taste is euphoric, inspiring visions of flowering weeds erupting from broken concrete.
- **Internal**: A bed of flowers and grasses blanket the ground, calling to you to lay down and shed your modern responsibilities.
- **Internal**: You must find and protect the broken angel from your dreams. She's desperately calling to you from somewhere in the harsh city.

CHOKMAH

The Thousand-Headed God, Chokmah was apparently destroyed during Kether's assaults, and disappeared from Metropolis. However, humanity remains completely and intimately bound to his Principle, *Submission*. Since our imprisonment, many people have instinctively desired to remain on our elbows and knees, offering ourselves over to the divine. Archon Chokmah dwells in our hearts and our souls, inspiring us to capitulate and surrender.

In these times of tumult, the Archon's influence has been renewed. We yearn for acceptance from parental figures and submit to their guidance. As such, tyrants and despots have regained authority and prominence, politically empowered by populations seeking an idealized patriarch. To gain acceptance and recognition, humanity willingly forfeits our individuality and accepts any truth.

- **World**: Citizens camp outside the presidential home, desperate to catch a glimpse of their "Blessed Father." They swear to destroy the traitors and devils in His Name.
- **World**: Across the country, pilgrims begin unearthing and reconstructing temples devoted to Mithras. Many die from disease and exposure, working mindlessly.
- **Surrounding**: Around your city, people from all walks of life anoint their heads with an ashen cross with an black eye in the center.
- **Surrounding**: A woman murders her family, harvesting their bodies to create a vessel for the coming Messiah.
- **Internal**: Give yourself over to the leader. Surrender your will and they shall free you of worry and shame.
- **Internal**: You stare at your hand as it hovers over the blistering flames. The pain proves your devotion. The brand shall proclaim your obedience.

GEBURAH

The Judge, Geburah utilizes his Principle, *Law*, to ensnare humanity inside an infinite labyrinth of rules and regulations. In this bureaucratic nightmare, legal conditions and statues shape and bend any concept of fairness beyond recognition. Justice becomes capital, denied to the innocent and bought by the guilty. Winning cases holds more value than the truth. Civil freedoms are dissolved, and law enforcement trample citizens' rights for their own 'protection.' Criminals and downtrodden alike are incarcerated, locked away from our civilized world. Legal contracts and agreements bind everything, allowing the Archon to influence business, religion, and government.

Humanity submits to the Archon's control freely, even when edicts and laws lack meaning and logic. This is the insidious nature of Geburah's Principle, as each society's freedoms, rights, and safety are inherently defined by its laws. From birth, our lives are guided by the Archon's will, as we avoid breaking these legal constraints, fearful of being punished and ostracized.

- **World**: A new state law is passed, requiring all citizens who default on loan repayments to be indentured to their credit agency.
- **World**: Reincarnations must be applied for and receive governmental approval; otherwise, they are considered unlawful and invalidated.
- **Surrounding**: A seemingly healthy man (who actually suffers from chronic pain) is beaten to death by fellow passengers when he sits in the handicapped seat. Attackers blame the victim for his behavior.
- **Surrounding**: An law to remove "unsightly" people from city streets leads to handicapped and visibly maimed individuals being fined and incarcerated.
- **Internal**: The police officer leans into your window; their face is a mask of translucent skin and scarlet lips. "Do you know why I stopped you?"
- **Internal**: You feel pangs of guilt for jay-walking, even though the street is empty. Maybe you should confess your crime?

HOD

Throughout history, humanity has given itself over to Hod, **the Punisher**. Humanity instinctively seeks to uphold the Archon's Principle, *Honor*. We must protect our national and personal pride above all else, never backing down when questioned. Vendettas, blood oaths, and familial traditions have cost countless lives, toppled countries, and altered great dynasties. Pettiness drives us to terrible acts, as we refuse to back down or accept reality.

The Archon's greatest advantage is his Principle's basic tenet, ingrained within us throughout our lives. Typically, acting honorably is considered a positive trait, encouraged and even praised by many societies. However, the Archon twists this quality until it deforms the soul into something dangerous and vile. We can go from defending our morality to committing honor killings in short order. When we unite communally, the results can be devastating, as entire nations march to destruction without hesitation.

- **World**: An sudden spike in of acid attacks maim dozens, as friends, family, and even strangers carry out vengeance for forgotten wrongs.
- **World**: A genocide denier launches a libel suit against several international news agencies, declaring that his country's reputation has been damaged. When the suit is thrown out, he decides to take a more violent route.
- **Surrounding**: An art school is firebombed by a rejected applicant, killing and maiming several students. She claims the instructors disrespected her abilities.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation claims you've embarrassed and insulted them. If you don't change your behavior, they'll have to correct the issue.
- **Internal**: You must keep posting your thoughts in this thread. You're right and people need to know the truth.
- **Internal**: Your fist strikes the smug bastard's face again and again. Maybe next time he'll look where he's going.

KETHER

The First Archon, Kether's hold over humanity has remained absolute from our earliest days. We desire *Hierarchy*, craving structure and routine in our lives. His tyrannical influence instills us with unwavering loyalty and devotion, blinding us to our superiors' fallacies and faults. We suppress our egos, accepting our humble position within the social order, no matter how poorly we're treated. For what are personal desires compared to the nation's needs?

Worse, embracing our individuality risks being ostracized from society. Few things terrify us more, as we are communal creatures. The Archon's Principle deepens and compounds this fear, driving us to betray ourselves in order to be accepted. Through Kether, we fulfill our existential needs, establishing our place and purpose.

- **World**: Everyone hails the new leader. No one questions the radical political changes and new laws, as they are his commands – and they must be obeyed.
- **World**: Crowds across the world watch the livestream as the newly-crowned prince's carriage approaches his resplendent summer palace. The crowd ignores the king's ravaged body dragging behind it.
- **Surrounding**: Your colleagues become enthralled by the new corporate regulations and structure. They heed your boss' every word, even as their freedoms are stripped away.
- **Surrounding**: The elevator opens, revealing factory workers crammed inside. They haven't the strength to glance up. The doors close to the distant sound of grinding metal.
- **Internal**: The TV announcement demands you should remain indoors "Until Further Notice" due to "an unexpected anomaly". There is no explanation forthcoming. You trust the authorities and do as they say.
- **Internal**: You want to fit in and obey. Your superiors must be heeded. Questioning their demands fills your head and heart with pain.

MALKUTH

Once humanity's captor, Malkuth personified *Conformity* and established our prison's vast architecture and inherent nature. For millennia, her will and intricate systems bound us completely, shackling our souls. However, after the Demiurge disappeared, something shifted within the Archon, transforming her Principle. Now, **The Rebel** represents our Awakening. Malkuth actively combats her fellow Archons, striving to destroy the very Illusion she created.

Malkuth's machinations are completely alien, though she does try to Awaken us. Despite her efforts, she is not humanity's altruistic savior; her methods show no respect for human comfort or consent. The Archon remains beyond our comprehension, representing the tumult in our trapped souls. Just as she heartlessly imprisoned us, she now mercilessly rips the scales from our eyes. Blood is spilt and lives are destroyed. She is the primal chaos, simultaneously liberating and annihilating us.

- **World**: The Institute claims its advanced stem-cell therapies and dietary treatments can transform its clients into new people.
- **World**: A viral video from a biohacking conference shows an abomination of meat and metal addressing the audience about liberty from the flesh.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation becomes increasingly reckless, believing her personal superiority will protect her. She puts herself through near-suicidal physical challenges, simply to prove that she can.
- **Surrounding**: Six children walk in a straight line, linked together by their clasped hands.They're identical in every regard, hairless and pale. They remain completely silent as they pass you.
- **Internal**: You feel the skin beneath itching. Your true face stirs once more. Cut away the old flesh and welcome the new.
- **Internal**: You feel no fear, only impatience. Time to take the world by the throat and claim what's yours.

NETZACH

Even before our captivity, conflict was ingrained within mankind. **The Victor**, Netzach, reflects our desire to win at any cost, sacrificing anything and everything to triumph. However, his Principle of *Victory* extends far beyond the battlefield. We crave success in business, love, and personal achievements. We struggle to prove our superiority to the world and to ourselves. Our peers and family are nothing but obstacles to our conquest.

For Netzach, Victory represents a sacred duty to achieve perfection. reality is a Machine; one only as great as the sum of its parts, and, thus, inherently flawed. To obtain Perfection, these parts must be understood, tested, and hardened. This process can only be achieved through conflict in all things. Victory pushes reality closer to perfection, eliminating its weakness, and empowering the Demiurge.

- **World**: Aircraft from the Reliant carrier-group firebomb an entire township of "suspected" rebels. Media outlets praise the bravery of the pilots, even though the confirmed victims were non-combatants.
- **World**: Attacks by "security contractors" against unions dramatically increase as corporate officers demand that employees work ever harder.
- **Surrounding**: A military recruitment officer accosts you on the street, getting increasingly agitated when you don't immediately agree to die for your country.
- **Surrounding**: Teens have begun ritual combats on the local football field. They fight to establish who amongst them is crowned The First.
- **Internal**: The uniform makes you feel powerful, invincible. Others are inferior to you. Remind them of this truth.
- **Internal**: Do it again! Failure is not an option. You must succeed. You're better than this.

TIPHARETH

The Spider in the Web, Tiphareth stretches out her silken tendrils to ensnare humanity's dreams. We submit to her freely, entranced by her Principle of *Allure*. Celebrities are canonized, condemned, and cannibalized by their fans. Our cherished idols are quickly cast aside and demonized when they refuse to stand on the pedestals we've built for them. Beauty begets admiration, while mediocracy instills contempt. Narcissism blinds us and redefines our truths, separating us from one another. Meanwhile, the Archon spins her courtly intrigues, tugging upon our heartstrings, and binding humanity ever tighter.

Tiphareth's weapons are compliments and innuendo, power and pleasure. In her grip, we freely close our eyes and abandon our morality. Through the Internet and media, she dulls our minds and inflames our passions. Our muse and mistress, the Archon empowers our imaginations, even as she imprisons our thoughts. She does not wish to directly control and repress humanity, but to have mankind serve her freely. After all, love makes the most devoted slaves.

- **World**: Utilizing biological materials "donated" by celebrities, *Sympathetic Divinity* allows clients to become more like their idols through gene therapy.
- **World**: The *Ecstasy Challenge* becomes an Internet craze, as streamers test their pain threshold in inventive ways. Some wind up in local ICUs with expressions of wonder on their frozen faces.'
- **Surrounding**: Local youths abandon their gender and identity, embracing the Divine Aesthetic. Many engage in extreme body modification.
- **Surrounding**: Twin rows of hyperreal mannequins line carpeted hall. Dressed in the latest fashions, they remain perfectly still and unblinking, hands held in silent claps. You feel their false eyes judging your every imperfection.
- **Internal**: Your fingers bleed from the strain, but you must get the music out into the world.
- **Internal**: You keep checking your reflection, seeking out any imperfection, any flaw. There are still so many.

YESOD

Humanity's ability to envy has influenced generations. We yearn for what we lack and covet what we do not possess. Our hungers are insatiable, our greed knows no boundaries. **The Founder**, Yesod, encourages mankind's insatiable desires, infusing our souls with *Avarice*. An embodiment of desire, the Archon fuels the world's boundless materialism through corporate and criminal empires. His influence remains as ephemeral as the currencies that grease the wheels of progress. In Yesod's name, humanity abandons its morality and condemns its future, suckling every last scrap of marrow from our world's broken bones.

Capitalism separates mankind into classes, dividing us through wealth and privilege. Society's upper echelons trample the poverty-stricken, feeding upon their struggles like bloated ticks. The Illusion convinces us that fortunes await those who push themselves that one step farther. Corporations grind up their employees, spitting out the dust as an offering to industry. Welfare programs are gutted, tuitions are inflated, and interest rates enforced with draconian methods, assuring the wealth-divide remains an impenetrable gulf. Once our clock runs out, we are cast aside, allowed to retire to our graveyard of plastic trinkets.

- **World**: An agricultural conglomerate announces its acquisition of vast swathes of farm land, despite protests from local residents.
- **World**: An entire firm of stockbrokers kill themselves and their families after the market takes a sudden dive.
- **Surrounding**: Debt collectors arrive at night, taking the defaulter's children as collateral. They're given ten days to pay before the auction.
- **Surrounding**: Living bodies are adhered to their office furniture. Pulsing cables reach out from their computers, worming into noses, mouths, and eyes. An empty cubicle beckons you.
- **Internal**: Your neighbors flaunt their wealth, giving daily reminders that you're pathetic and poor. Take what's theirs. You deserve it.
- **Internal**: The homeless downtown are parasites, feeding off proper society's blood. Remove them before they come for what you own.

The Death Angels

Dark reflections of the Archons, the Death Angels are manifestations of the Illusion's side effects. They seek to corrupt our natures and reinforce our worst tendencies. They feed our darkest impulses, plunging us into self-destruction. In Astaroth's absence, they've increased their efforts to infiltrate Elysium and damage the Illusion. They do not seek to liberate humanity, but enslave it to their terrible wills. They truly wish to bring hell to Earth.

A Death Angel's essence and will reside within its Citadel. Its true manifestations are generally limited to Inferno (see *KDL*, p. 323, *The Influence of the Death Angels*). However, these cosmic entities can reach across the Illusion and influence Elysium, albeit more subtly than the Archons. How Death Angels impose their wills upon humanity are discussed below, as well as new perspectives on their Principles, allowing the GM to introduce new themes to her narratives. These manifestations of the Death Angels are strongly connected to *Imposed Reality* (p. 161).

CHAGIDIEL

The Bloodstained Patriarch, Chagidiel incites humanity's self-inflicted violence and Abuse. Our homes become battlegrounds, where abusers strip us of our dignity and worth through their physical and mental torture. Our hearts are deadened by betrayals by those sworn to love and protect us. We diminish ourselves to avoid punishment, while our fears prevent us from breaking the abusive cycle. Deprived of self-worth, our existence is only defined through the insults and violence. Even our tormentors believe their purpose is to chastise and discipline, blaming their victims for their actions.

More insidiously, we turn this abuse inward, pursuing our personal destruction. Chagidiel encourages these tendencies, reminding us of our shame and weakness. If we are worthless and vile, punishment is our only acceptable reward. We torture our flesh, ravage our souls, spiraling down into our prisons of regret. We deserve our fates, and must lash out at any who'd deny us our penance.

- **World**: Through bureaucratic oversights, the government loses dozens of migrant children, admitting they have no system for locating them.
- **World**: A teenager escapes her secluded community, reporting polygamy, incest, and rampant abuse. Authorities refuse to investigate her claims due to political pressure.
- **Surrounding**: The Teptov Youth Commune offers rehabilitation for troubled children, using strict discipline and supervision.
- **Surrounding**: Accused of the recent string of child murders, the transient kills himself during his interrogation. Two weeks later, another child's body is discovered in the same dumping ground.
- **Internal**: You deserved it. They're stressed out and you obviously said something wrong.
- **Internal**: Toughen them up. The world is harsh. Better they learn it now.

GAMALIEL

Our desires are complicated and intimate. Revealing them exposes our innermost souls, leaving us vulnerable. Gamaliel, **the Father of Abominations**, alleviates our loneliness and solitude with his Principle, Lust. As our needs intensify, we fear that we are perverted or aberrant, leading to rejection and ridicule. We doubt our beauty and importance, humiliated by our yearning bodies. Intimacy engulfs us, threatening to subsume our individuality. But mostly, we fear isolation, and allow our flesh to be violated, if only to feel connected to anything and anyone.

As the Internet expands its influence, we become increasingly separated from others, fearing their touch as much as we despise our own needs. Entire industries now fulfill these desires and calm our self-doubts. They allow us to sequester ourselves from the world, locked in perpetual pleasure without consequences. They encourage us to delve deeper into depravity, urging us to abandon all shame and dismiss consent as a luxury.

- **World**: *Simulacrum* offers lifelike sex robots with advanced interactivity. Each doll can be built and programmed to provide a plethora of perversions.
- **World**: Citizen journalists continually report the location of local celebrities, leading to an up-and-coming singer being publicly murdered by his stalker.
- **Surrounding**: A group of secretive individuals provide sanctuary for those interested in choking someone during sex. If you pay extra, they'll find you someone who will *really* struggle.
- **Surrounding**: The computer screen ripples and moves. Dark, moist holes open in its sensual surface. The air floods with heady musk.
- **Internal**: The clerk is obviously flirting with you. They'd probably let you do all the things you want. All of them. You wouldn't even have to ask.
- **Internal**: Hide your desires. People won't understand. You're broken inside for wanting these things.

GAMICHICOTH

The Agitator, Gamichicoth has been with humanity since our imprisonment, infusing us with fear. This Principle, above all others, forms the underlying nature of existential dread. Paranoia and xenophobia divide us, making us fear and despise those different from us. Shame damages our relationships, even with friends and family. We dread our physical demise. We gather at the abyss's edge, gazing into our meaninglessness. And Gamichicoth stares back.

The Death Angel's most insidious manifestation is the False Rescuer. In addition to inciting *Fear*, he offers relief from its clutches. Lulled by promises of safety, he deadens our souls into complacent denial and serenity. Once we're at peace, Gamichocoth destroys these false sanctuaries, plunging us into despair. Soon, we dread any offering us comfort and protection, falling deeper into paranoia and doubt.

- **World**: The government issues sensational warnings of impending terrorist threats, urging people to keep an eye out for suspicious activities. However, they never specifically state what the threats are.

- **World**: Dozens of refugees die from black mold exposure, contracted while being housed in facilities provided by a charitable foundation.
- **Surrounding**: Each week, the local news covers local sexual predators in the area. Due to fraudulent reporting, several innocents are harassed and beaten by their neighbors.
- **Surrounding**: Police issue city-wide curfews, announcing that the city is under siege by a serial killer. Every night, several people are incarcerated without cause.
- **Internal**: Are you seeing things? Is this dementia? Maybe you need to go to the doctors. Maybe it's too late.
- **Internal**: Don't trust good Samaritans. Their false smiles and promises will only lead to ruin.

GOLAB

Social sadism has grown increasingly pervasive in our modern world. Once confined to the darkest places, Golab, **The Torturer**, now resides within our workplaces, the Internet, and bedrooms, inspiring us with his Principle, *Torment*. The 'dark triad' of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy provokes violence and cruel indifference. We delight in *Schadenfreude*-inducing stories and video, reveling in the mental and emotional pain suffered by friends and strangers alike. We refuse to address the suffering of incarcerated people, insisting that they must deserve it. We mock homeless people as pathetic addicts. In this 'Sadocracy,' we don't feel truly alive unless we're standing on someone's throat. When another's anguish lacks meaning, we turn our cruelty inward – torturing our flesh and souls. We desperately need to feel something, anything, and anguish comes in so many delicious flavors.

- **World**: The news report details how tourists trapped at a snowed-in ski-lodge devolved into cannibalism and murder. However, rescuers arrived after only three days.
- **World**: It's not difficult to find videos of people dying. You just have to know where to look. Torturers, war criminals, and sadistic attention-seekers post their work all over the Internet.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation suffers relentless attacks from Internet trolls, destroying their livelihood. They don't know why.
- **Surrounding**: The newspaper's editorial column shares embarrassing facts about 'morally-suspect' locals. Commenters find these anecdotes amusing.
- **Internal**: Your lover's tears make them so beautiful. You should hurt them more often, even when they don't ask for it.
- **Internal**: The blade slices softly, offering blessed pain to dulling your troubled heart.

HAREB-SERAP

Our world burns around us, never knowing one day of peace. Innocent blood flows in our places of government, learning, and worship. Distrust and doubt saturate our daily lives, inciting fear and hatred of those around us. **The Father of Carnage**, Hareb-Serap's influence extends far beyond the battlefield, corrupting our sanctuaries with his Principle, *Conflict*. Minor arguments with loved ones now end in bloodshed. Corporate offices become war zones, where lives are forfeit. Teachers carry handguns, while unarmed children are murdered by police. Extremists and protesters clash in city streets, spurred on by politicians and social media. As we become increasingly polarized, dissection and distrust fester within us, threatening to explode in an all-consuming firestorm.

The Death Angel also fuels our inner conflicts, placing us at odds with ourselves. Soldiers and refugees bleed from invisible wounds, long after their wars end. We fight our natures and deny who we are. Our instincts clash and oppose one another until we finally spiral into self-destruction. The bloodiest battlefields lurk within us, their travesties unending.

- **World**: A proxy war erupts between regional rivals, consuming an isolated city in violence. Civilians are trapped by the fighting, dying daily from conflict, disease, and starvation.
- **World**: Military contractors are granted amnesty from war crimes after opening fire on an entire marketplace.
- **Surrounding**: After their recent military tour, your Relation has become increasingly distracted and depressed. They want to return to where the *real* action is. They had a routine there.
- **Surrounding**: An innocent bystander is stabbed to death when trying to peacefully intervene in a public argument. Their killer is the person they sought to protect.
- **Internal**: It's too quiet. Too peaceful. You need the comforting screams of battle. Start a fight, now. Make the silence end.
- **Internal**: Deny your desires. Suppress your deviant feelings. You will win this war with nature.

NAHEMOTH

Chaos prevails across our planet, forever shredding its pristine fabric. In the New Millennium, the ground beneath our feet is sand and blood, always threatening to swallow us whole. **The Tarnished World**, Nahemoth poisons everything we believe and trust with her Principle, *Discord*. As entropy reigns supreme, we question our significance and are infused with existential dread. We embrace nihilism, perpetuating the dissolution of self. Order is an illusion. God is dead. Our indifference universe shall consume us, leaving nothing to show we existed.

Nahemoth calls us, and we answer. Without a sense of meaning, we're tempted to abandon morality and embrace chaos. Without hope, we surrender ourselves to absurdity and apathy. Incensed by our impending doom, we lash out at others or inflict pain upon ourselves. With no consequences or future, it's a struggle to contain our worst impulses.

- **World**: Oil thieves break into the company's main pipeline, unleashing an environmental disaster. Farmlands and waterways remain polluted for years.
- **World**: An entire township walks out into the approaching blizzard, allowing themselves to die of exposure.
- **Surrounding**: Council members deny altering health reports that showed years of lead contamination in city's water supply.
- **Surrounding**: Bored teens start invading and vandalizing homes. Their destructive tendencies continue escalating, growing increasingly sadistic.
- **Internal**: Abandon your morals. They mean nothing anyway. Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.
- **Internal**: Nothing you do matters in the end. Why fight the inevitable? Embrace the void.

SAMAEL

We find significance in hatred, purpose in spite. At our darkest moment, revenge sustains our souls, justifying our worst atrocities. **Divine Poison**, Samael inspires our barbaric impulses and inherent pettiness with his Principle, *Vengeance*. This violent nature extends far beyond personal vendettas and reprisals. Through prejudice, he unites like-minded souls, offering them shared importance in their mutual hatreds. We descend into the mob mentality, blindly destroying our community to avenge perceived wrongs.

Samuel dulls our existential fear, providing us focus and comfort in this confusing and hostile world. Our failures and weaknesses can be blamed on others, relieving us of pain and guilt. Jealousy incites violence, envy rouses bloodshed. We lash out against those who offend us or deny us love. In that instant of bloodletting, we reaffirm our significance.

- **World**: Hate crimes become more prevalent. Perpetrators adopt the now-legal *Fear Defense*, blaming their victim's otherness for their violent actions.
- **World**: An Internet chat group encourages people to vent their grievances and pain. Some members carry their hunger for retribution into the real world.
- **Surrounding**: Police round up and torture anyone even remotely connected to the random shooting of a local official.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation wants you to help them kidnap their spouse's killer: a young woman, who fell asleep while driving.
- **Internal**: It's been years since it happened. Why can't you forgive yourself? Why do you keep punishing yourself?
- **Internal**: Compassion is weakness. Never apologize and always avenge.

SATHARIEL

In our greatest age of connection we find ourselves increasingly isolated, lonely, and without hope. Our polarized society despises the outsider and fears the unknown. **The Princess of Angst**, Sathariel is the living embodiment of our existential dread. Her Principle, *Exclusion*, divides us from each other, robs us of emotional value, and pollutes our personal beliefs. In our desperation to be accepted, we conceal our dreams and thoughts, lest we be ostracized for them. This need creates deeper divisions and clannishness, further isolating us.

As dread consumes us, we seek meaning in self-destruction and violent rage. We torture ourselves, guilt driving us into addiction and self-harm. We punish those who've shunned us, hurting them as they've harmed us. We lash out at those who'd offer us false hopes and destroy those who'd threaten our beliefs. Isolation offers us solace. Accept the liberation of oblivion.

- **World**: Tribal violence erupts, driving UN peacekeepers from the region. Survivors describe mutilations and gang rapes, bodies stacked in mass graves. However, the atrocities were committed against friends and family, not enemies.
- **World**: 'Suicide forests' gain popularity. People hang themselves in rural locations. However, most showed no signs of depression prior to their death.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation abandons their livelihood and joins the local tent city. They disappear amongst the collective of vagrants and homeless people.
- **Surrounding**: Your neighbor is evicted from their home after residents complain of the stench. The home's interior is a hoarder's nightmare, packed with debris and filth.
- **Internal**: The blood whispers to you, reciting your failures. A sharp knife will help get it out.
- **Internal**: The world is empty. You are alone. Though you hear signs of life nearby, you can never find its source.

THAUMIEL

We fear losing control and fight to maintain our authority over our daily lives. **The Inequitable Ruler**, Thaumiel, drives us to seek this world's most precious commodity: *Power*. It drives every aspect of our world, enforcing the will of others upon us. We must surrender to their dominance and wear their invisible shackles. Privilege is never earned, always provided through cultural and financial entitlement. Unspoken hierarchies shape entire nations, depriving its citizens of their rights.

Through dominance, we confirm our worth and significance to ourselves and others. We eliminate any who might threaten our beliefs or question our superiority. In this quest, no sin is beneath us: betrayal, violence, and murder. Deprived of power, we feel empty, useless, and without merit. Fearing insignificance, we seek power wherever it may be found – and pay any cost to acquire it.

- **World**: The leader declares national holidays to honor themselves. Attendance is mandatory and tributes will be collected.
- **World**: When someone cuts in line, store patrons tear each other apart. The author provides the survivors with personalized signed copies of their inspirational book.
- **Surrounding**: The justice department begins questioning city employees to root out the Deep State. Those accused of sedition are arrested for government corruption and "promoting globalism".
- **Surrounding**: People continue filing into the stockyard, drawn by the loudspeaker's nationalistic slogans. They move together in perfect formation, as if they've rehearsed this a thousand times over.
- **Internal**: Forget your friends. They'll only stand in your way.
- **Internal**: Your peer is undermining your authority. Make an example of them.

TOGARINI

The Black Sun, Togarini's corrupting light shines within our hearts and minds, inspiring our desires and yearnings. Yet, his Principle, *Compulsion*, offers us little relief and no escape, forever driving us to both create and destroy. Indulging our addictions and cravings infuses us with meaning and mutes ours of fears. This blazing sun burns away our personalities, however, leaving nothing but hollow ashes behind. We are the candle burning at both ends, consumed by our passions.

More insidiously, Togarini's influence drags us down into confusion and distress, fracturing our troubled psyches. We fear disturbances to our world, desperately seeking symmetry and avoiding contamination. We hoard and steal useless items. Even when our addictions end in self-destruction, we only embrace them tighter. Our compulsions empower us, even as they destroy us.

- **World**: Impromptu confessions breakout across the country, apparently triggered by religious fear and guilt. Several people are arrested after revealing horrific crimes.
- **World**: An Internet meme about the Great Disappointment goes viral, prompting hundreds of pilgrims to descend on an empty patch of forest. Once there, they engage in a Bacchanal frenzy to celebrate the End Times.
- **Surrounding**: A local restaurant offers *Extreme Eating Night*. People consume inanimate objects, such as batteries, pins, and razor blades, to prove who has the strongest stomach.
- **Surrounding**: The community art-festival devolves into chaos as patrons begin destroying "flawed" pieces.
- **Internal**: Your collection of old newspapers needs to be sorted again, but you're running out of room for them in your home. Better knock down some walls.
- **Internal**: Each night, you hear an angelic voice inspiring you to create. But when you awake, you feel increasingly weaker, as you never rested.

CHAPTER 7

DISTURBING BEHAVIORS

ISAK'S LIMBS FELT LEADEN, DISTANT; THIN ROPES BITING INTO THEM. SMOKE filled his senses, heavy with ginger and spring onions. "You're awake." A woman's voice. "Good. The coals are ready." He forced his head in its direction, dimly recognizing it. A raven-haired woman stood with her back to him, arranging metal skewers on an elegant plate. Bowls and cooking utensils lined the table. A portable grill glowed in the grim light.

The woman turned. Violet's butchered face had turned septic, drooping loosely. One familiar eye shone like green flame. Isak moaned. His numb mouth formed only guttural noises. "Best not fight the drugs, cousin," she said. "You'll only hurt yourself." She lifted a scalpel; its blade flashing like a smile. "Did you know the human foot contains seven thousand nerve endings?" Her bruised lips mimicked the knife's cruel grin. "No? Well, in short, this is definitely going to hurt."

Violet placed a skewer beside Isak's ankle, and then delicately lifted his foot, exposing the arch. The scalpel opened an incision beneath his toes, peeling away an inch-long strip. Pain became his entire world. She deftly placed the meat on the skewer, then repeated the process. Again. And again. "This won't kill you," she smiled. "Not for awhile, anyway. They gifted you to me. And I cherish their kindnesses."

OVERVIEW

Disturbing Behaviors *explores the themes of extreme horror.* Extreme horror refers to hardcore genres, such as New French Extremity, Torture Porn, Giallo, and Splatterpunk. The chapter outlines the most unsettling and upsetting aspects of humanity, focusing on the pain of a knife entering flesh rather than the fear of encountering a ghost. However, much like Paris' infamous Grand Guigol, these grisly narratives offer something far deeper than violent exploitation and hypersexualization. Beneath the spilled blood and flayed skin, social conventions and political themes can be examined with unforgiving frankness and – hopefully – truth. Drawing from the atrocities of yesterday and today, the chapter provides GMs with ways to incorporate extreme horror into the stories, as well as how to weave these themes into the game's central mythos Extreme horror does not need to forgo supernatural themes to be effective, it merely needs to focus on the evil humanity perpetrates on itself.

TRANSGRESSIVE SOULS

Humanity cannot escape its violent tendencies and dark desires. The supernatural horrors of the ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** cannot hold a candle to humanity's propensity for inflicting brutality and degradation upon itself. Our past has been guided and shaped by countless generations of violence. Even in our current 'Enlightened' age, these grotesque acts continually destroy lives and ravage souls. Beneath our civilized veneer, humanity's profane needs fester and swell, ready to burst forth at the slightest provocation. Some even deify these offenses, wallowing in the quagmire of torment and cruelty. Those who suppress their basest instincts frequently dismiss the travesties around them, accepting an onslaught of horrors as the status quo.

There Are No Limits

Extreme horror stories frequently employ graphic violence and hypersexualization. Its narratives violate most cultural and social taboos, such as cannibalism, child abuse, incest, rape, sexual slavery, and prolonged onscreen torture. The genre also subverts *quiet horror* by revealing every disturbing detail in extremis, leaving nothing to the imagination. In doing so, extreme horror reflects humanity's vile realities, forcing us to deal with them without ambiguity.

However, extreme horror frequently skirts the razor's edge between exposition and exploitation, easily devolving from poignancy into pointlessness. Despite its voyeuristic nature, extreme horror should not be used merely to shock and titillate. As such, striking this proper balance can be challenging for GMs. This subversive material must have *thematic purpose*, even when it's obscured beneath blood, guts, and other fluids. Furthermore, its darkness and gore shouldn't violate player limits simply to disgust and offend. Otherwise, extreme horror conversations lose their effect and can come across shallow or even boring, as shock value stands in for an actual story. Indeed, unless the GM and players have tailored their *Horror Contract* toward these specific themes, endless streams of violence and violation will be counterproductive – even potentially breaking up an otherwise friendly gaming table.

SUMMARY

Transgressive Souls: An examination of the core principles of extreme horror.

A Litany of Violence: The different subgenres of extreme horror.

The Center Cannot Hold: How our darker impulses drive us to the extreme.

The Devil Beside Me: The monsters we trust and love.

Own Worst Enemy: Extreme horror of the self and turning violence inward.

The Reality of Pain: A narrative exploration of pain and injuries, and how to incorporate them.

NO LIMITS, EXCEPT...

Perhaps of all the *atmospherics* presented in this supplement, extreme horror will test the limits of most *Horror Contracts*. Its darker narratives can offend and gravely upset the players. Even if certain subjects have not been restricted, the GM should remain conscious of their audience. They shouldn't be afraid to fade-to-black or completely avoid and/or gloss over extreme acts. The same consideration should be employed while establishing and maintaining the overall tone throughout these stories. Make sure everyone at the table is comfortable and employ the proper **safety tools**.

Have Something to Say

One recurring theme in extreme horror is *social commentary*. Physical and sexual violence are frequently used to showcase contemporary fears and sociopolitical issues. For several decades, extreme horror's constant reemergence in cinema and literature has usually coincided with painful cultural challenges, such as civil unrest, political upheaval, terrorism, and war. Its creators wished to not only strike a nerve, but completely flay it, forcing us to examine our world in grisly detail. For example, the *splatterpunk movement* emerged as a direct affront to quiet horror, which some felt was too polite for their tempestuous times.

When devoid of meaning, extreme horror lacks emotional impact. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the GM should use disturbing violence to reveal personal horrors, cultural taboos, and communal anxieties. Rather than simply invoking revulsion, a good GM incorporates these hyperviolent themes to question and explore the societal psyche. Through brutal honesty, they expose systemic social issues, injustices, and human cruelty, narratively exploring the limits of morality and order. As such, the GM should closely examine the concepts and themes she wish to convey through this style of horror.

- **World**: A philanthropic organization provides troubled teens free counseling and training on their island retreat. However, once there, the youths are subjected to mental, physical, and sexual torture by the group's wealthy donors.
- **World**: The female-exclusive group, Megaera, is connected with ritualistic mutilations and killings of abusers. An increasing number of victims are being targeted for lesser offenses.
- **Surrounding**: A string of violent home invasions inspire communal distrust and paranoia. In response, concerned citizens resort to vigilante justice. Random attacks are on the rise.
- **Surrounding**: An arthouse theater's midnight show begins featuring hyperrealistic horror movies, each more brutal than the last. You recognize one of the actors portraying a victim: they're a local missing person.
- **Internal**: The hot brand sears into your naked back. You barely hear the singing over your screams.
- **Internal**: The pliers feel warm in your hand. *You can do this*. They deserve it. Make things right again.

Embrace Controversy

Extreme horror explores the darkest corners of human depravity, unflinchingly and unforgivingly. Many of its common themes are considered taboo subjects, unspoken of, despite their social prevalence. Sexual predation, nonconsensual sadomasochism, religious radicalism, and child abuse are rarely addressed anywhere else. Extreme horror examines these themes with stark frankness and honesty, exposing the indefensible for all to see.

By thoughtfully introducing these forbidden subjects, the GM can create intense narratives that are as disturbing as they are revelatory. When handled with respect and finesse, these controversial subjects can be incorporated to take players out of their comfort zone. However, although she's free to embrace the nihilistic nature of some extreme horror, the GM must remember that she and her fellow players are present to play a horror game first and foremost. The *Horror Contract* must be respected and upheld, even if the subject matter is based on reality.

- **World**: Dozens of United Nations peacekeepers engage in human trafficking. Working with local criminal gangs, they are responsible for kidnapping and enslaving hundreds of refugees.
- **World**: The killer strikes anywhere they please. They obliterate each victim's entire existence, bathing them in bleach and removing their head, fingers, and other identifiers.
- **Surrounding**: In your father's closet, boxes are neatly stacked from floor to ceiling. Each contains a single trinket: a doll, a stuffed animal, a candy bracelet. Most are speckled with dried blood.
- **Surrounding**: The steely-eyed girl kicks the cowering man, adding another welt to his abused flesh. She points at you, hissing, "I want it, Daddy. I want it, now. Fetch."
- **Internal**: You slip your shirt over the scars, permanent reminders of your parents' devotion to the *Thing Between The Walls*.
- **Internal**: There's a sharp pain, and then you know only ecstasy. You sink into the bed, smothered in heroin warmth. The bad thoughts fade. Down here, you won't hurt anyone again.

No Rhyme, No Reason

Despite extreme horror's social commentary, much of its immediate terror stems from the lack of empathy and ambiguous motivations of its antagonists. Methodical death cults and malformed cannibals butcher their victims without pause or mercy. Serial rapists and laughing monsters violate captives, savoring power over pleasure. Abusers and sadists torture their victims in cold, calculating ways, transforming them into mere vessels for receiving pain. Extreme horror antagonists do not pause to regret the harm they cause remorseless in their destruction.The motives they have, whenever expressed frankly, are always cruelly self-interested. One cannot negotiate with or plead for mercy with these antagonists; we're completely helpless against their violence.

However, when presenting these stories, the GM must not solely focus on the antagonist; otherwise, the story devolves into pornography of power – shallow, gruesome, and without merit. Effective extreme horror does not focus on the 'monsters,' but rather their effect upon the characters. Indeed, violence – and those who inflict it – becomes inherently more terrifying when revealed for its sheer banality and nihilism.

- **World**: The news plays in an infinite loop, showing grainy videos of mangled bodies smoldering in mass graves. The reports never identify where these mass murders occurred, or who committed them.

- **World**: As temperatures rise, senseless acts of violence increase across the country. Commentators coin the phrase: "The Dying Season."
- **Surrounding**: She ignores the man's gargling cries as the box cutter frees his tongue from its squirming root. Dismissively, she chucks the meat to her waiting dog.
- **Surrounding**: The figure blindly searches the ground in front of them, leaving bloodied handprints. Pink bowels drag swish like an obscene tail from their prolapsed anus.
- **Internal**: You feel nothing as the crowbar splits their skull. Each blow remains distant, detached, like vague snapshots from someone else's life.
- **Internal**: As you sink into blessed darkness, escaping the pain, you dimly wonder, "Why me?"
- **Surrounding**: You can't take look away from the man's exquisitely braised torso, its blackened cock cheekily positioned to one side. The hostess smiles placidly and asks, "Is there any particular cut you'd prefer?"
- **Surrounding**: The curio shelf is lined with delicate bric-à-brac and polished antiques. At the collection's heart is a mason jar. Illuminated from below, the deformed fetus inside appears more tumor than child.
- **Internal**: You slip on the body's shit and viscera, flopping around like some vaudevillian actor.
- **Internal**: She whined so damned much about her tired feet. You stare at the infected stumps and begin snickering uncontrollably. Let's see her complain now!

Sharp Contrasts

Due to the violent nature of extreme horror, its narratives frequently rely upon *revulsion* – invoking the sensations of disgust, offense, and shock. We're repulsed by the subject matter, recoiling from its savagery and ugliness. However, much like jump-scares, these narratives lose their effect as they're repeated, becoming increasingly predictable, even boring. As such, tonal shifts are an excellent tool for introducing contrasts and subverting expectations, thus, maintaining an undercurrent of fear throughout the story. As discussed above, the violence must shock, but also be integral to the narrative. This is the distinction between using a sledgehammer and a jack hammer; one has impact, while the other is simply noise.

After their initial plunge into darkness, the players may be left feeling confused and unsettled. The GM can maintain these feelings of disorientation by introducing contrasting emotions such as humor and tenderness. These tonal shifts diverge from the abominable, momentarily diffusing unsettling situations. Then, interactions normally played for laughs turn threatening and deadly. Moments of comfort and intimacy become obscene and vicious. Soon, the players can no longer distinguish how to properly judge and react to each situation, intensifying their anxieties and dread. This narrative technique works well in extreme horror, which is specifically geared to throw audiences off-balance with its subversive violence and sexuality.

- **World**: The government begins broadcasting infomercials to combat the recent increase in sexual violence. Cartoonish animations depict graphic assaults, all set to saccharine music and cheerful voiceovers.
- **World**: A viral video shows several teens arguing over who gets to take their selfie with the bloated corpse they've discovered. Their argument devolves into comical pratfalls, and then murder.

Ghosts and Devils

Although extreme horror focuses heavily on realism, the GM can include supernatural aspects to subvert the narrative, or even add to it. The Illusion obscures the true nature of events and NPCs, as well as their hidden motivations. Humans influenced by the Higher Powers may offer the perfect narrative vehicle for introducing these existential threats. Similarly, those succumbing to Dreams, Madness, and Passion can act out terrible fantasies, hinting at something beyond our perception. Outwardly, their sins and transgressions appear mundane. As the conversation progresses, unnatural aspects appear adding mystery to the narrative. In contrast, seemingly supernatural events can have rational explanations. The GM encourages dreadful ambiguity, as players remain uncertain of what threat NPCs actually pose.

- **World**: Activists accuse government agencies of mutilating, lobotomizing, and branding immigrants with arcane symbols. Few survive these indoctrinations.
- **World**: Doctors report strange cases of self-induced insomnia. Patients suffer eerily similar nightmares, detailing their rape by monstrous figures. Most are dismissed until the pregnancies start.
- **Surrounding**: Angelic paintings adorn the walls, bathing the room in pastel hues, spiraling toward

the crib. Inside, the flayed lump writhes happily in its own shit and blood, impossibly alive.

- **Surrounding**: After midnight, you notice your neighbor dragging the trash bags out to their shed again. Unsettling lights and sounds creep through its newspaper-covered windows.
- **Internal**: When the moonlight stretches and night winds blow, you feel compelled to strip away your humanity. The Jackals are calling you.
- **Internal**: Mr. Happy's grin matches your own. Specks of blood decorate the mask's lacquer. You raise its cool, dark interior toward your face.

Microcosmos of Pain

KULT: Divinity Lost's narratives explore personal suffering and horror, stripping away the PCs' outer selves to reveal the raw nerves beneath. However, what are these personalized experiences worth when placed against the backdrop of far-reaching and violent events, such as civil unrest, pandemics, and wars? Outwardly, an individual's trauma appears trivial in comparison to indiscriminate death and torment – *what are a handful of sorrows amongst thousands*?

In truth, by framing personalized stories around grander events, the GM sharpens the narrative focus. As external pressures act upon the PCs, their personal beliefs and values are directly challenged. They must confront the horrors from without and within. Their responses reveal their true mettle. The more intense the pressure, the greater the revelation. Instead of being lost in the chaos, each individual life gains importance, lending further context to their trials and tribulations.

In turn, this juxtaposition allows the GM to explore these imposing themes more effectively. By exploring grand tragedy through personal lenses, they ground the larger concepts and ideas, lending credibility and significance to the unthinkable.

- **World**: In the besieged city, youths are dragged from their homes. The fortunate ones are sold to the local militia. Most are never seen again.
- **World**: Media and inspectors are barred from the country's deforestation project. However, video leaks out, documenting the unspeakable acts committed by corporate security against the indentured workers.
- **Surrounding**: The blackout has a stranglehold on the city. The night erupts in violence and flames. Masked figures pull people from their homes, their hands slick with blood.
- **Surrounding**: Winds howl outside, lashing the house with their fury. When the flood waters rise, you'll be stuck inside – with *them*. The storm will be more forgiving.
- **Internal**: No one would blame you for the killings. How many lives did they destroy in that shooting? They weren't even people anymore.
- **Internal**: You swallow down the poisonous words slung at you. *Monster. Murderer.* You could never have done those terrible things. But the faceless crowd hid so many monsters.

SLICES OF ANGUISH

Humanity's history records an endless string of suffering and travesty. Our past does not wish to be forgotten, even when we adamantly deny it. The Realm of Time and Space allows GMs to incorporate past events into their narratives, exploring our darkest moments. Beyond war and political strife, we've committed genocides, religious persecutions, and political internments – just within the last century. These historic cultural atrocities can mirror current trends, adding narrative weight to the GM's story. Indeed, the PC's gender, faith, race, or sexual orientation can lead to trouble, conflicting with attitudes unrestrained by current laws.

Even significant, far-reaching events contain microcosms of pain. For example, ***The Black Madonna*** juxtaposes the suffering of orphaned children against the horrific Siege of Leningrad. As the players experience the children's suffering, the PCs become emotionally invested in their individual fates. In contrast, the enormity of the children's experiences mirror the war's widespread destruction. This juxtaposition provides deeper significance for the story's grander themes. The GM can reflect other tragic events through these narrative lenses, layering the horrors atop one another for greater clarity.

- **World**: Death squads drag prominent religious figures into the streets. After mock trials, they're publicly executed. The attackers are dressed in uniforms from decades ago.
- **World**: An entire continent falls into perpetual twilight. No eruptions are detected, yet volcanic ash disrupts travel and contaminates the land. People inside this exclusion zone report violent raids by "raiders" with bronze-age weapons.
- **Surrounding**: Summer suddenly becomes inhumanly cold. In the courtyard, rows of men and women stand, pilloried. Covered in ice, their flesh turns black from frostbite. Japanese propaganda posters adorn the walls.
- **Surrounding**: Burning crucifixes illuminate the young man's hanging body. His description matches a civil rights worker who went missing over fifty years ago.
- **Internal**: Hide your feelings. Suppress your true self. Your thoughts are crimes here.
- **Internal**: Blood oozes from your now-nailless fingers, pulsing with raw fire. You can barely hear the hooded figure's voice. "*Do you confess, sinner?*"

A LITANY OF VIOLENCE

Extreme horror stories explore the darkest corners of the human heart, peeling back its layers to expose the rot beneath. While these narratives are all violent and unforgiving, they can be one of a number of genres, anywhere from psychological thrillers to grindhouse exploitation. These common subgenres approach extreme horror and its subject matter through different perspectives. Although they share similar themes and concepts, their presentation alters the characters and their role within the story. The GM can incorporate one, some, or all of these formats into the conversation.

Psychological Horror

Psychological horror draws its influences from classic thrillers, true crime, and psychological fiction. This theater of the troubled mind generally remains firmly entrenched in reality, exploring the ugliest sides of humanity. If supernatural elements exist, they remain ambiguous and obscured, so the true monster is never revealed. Fear stems from the character's flaws and vulnerabilities, revealing how fragile our peaceful world really is. The violence – both physical and sexual – is brutal and graphic, adding to the narrative's gritty and visceral realism. Police procedurals and similar narratives are common, featuring characters struggling against an unseen adversary. This format is particularly prevalent in *Giallo*, the Italian, horror-crime genre. Bleak and believable, this genre of extreme horror shows us at our worst – and best.

- **World**: The task-force asks for any information on the *Winterwolf*; a child-murderer, cannibal, and rapist. He (they assume it's a man) stalks homeless teens during the winter months, leaving only half-eaten pieces behind.
- **World**: The author of bestselling erotic novel *Daughter of the Marquis* is found crucified to her front door. Her fingers and tongue are missing. No one witnesses the crime and the security cameras reveal nothing.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation's car is found on the roadside, abandoned. The driver side window is smashed in, and blood stains the interior. Spray painted on the hood is one word: *Apollyon*.
- **Surrounding**: Your Contact asks you to hide the cardboard box for them. A faint smell of decay lingers around it. An ugly stain forms on its taped bottom.
- **Internal**: You still remember the sizzling pop as your uncle dripped boiling fat in your friend's eye. Afterwards, he told you not to share your special secret.
- **Internal**: You crumple the photograph, but its image remains seared into your mind. His head perfectly posed on the table, dead eyes staring blankly. You were too late.

The New Extreme

Transgressive and nihilistic, the **New Extreme** focuses on breaking cultural taboos and exposing humanity's cruelty in unforgiving detail. From the stylistic and thoughtful *New French Extremity* to gratuitous *Torture Porn*, this subgenre has evolved and expanded over several years. Spiritual successors to the Grand Guigol and American grindhouse/exploitation films, these horrific narratives explore human suffering in grisly detail, obliterating any privacy around sex and violence. Many narratives also draw inspiration from body horror, displaying the human form's destruction through physical mutilation and sexual assault. Many new extreme narratives possess underlying political and cultural statements, setting themselves against historical events to expose unpleasant truths in current – and past – society (see ***Microcosmos of Pain***, p. 182).

- **World**: Guided by astrological observations, a family of rapists and serial murderers travel to chosen locations and break into homes. They keep their victims alive until receiving new messages from the stars.
- **World**: The Mainyu Corporation wins a defamation suit against news coverage on its founders' incestuous practices. The reporter is later found dead and sexually mutilated.
- **Surrounding**: The Algea Club offers the darkest fantasies for masochists seeking to transcend the boundaries of pleasure and pain. It's said some never return, becoming permanent "fixtures".
- **Surrounding**: Your non-romantic Relation becomes obsessed with the idea that you are their long-dead spouse. You wake up in their basement as they prepare to remake you into their loved one.
- **Internal**: Wash away the sticky fluids. Some are yours, but they're mostly others. Why do you keep submitting to this? The emptiness always returns.
- **Internal**: The elegant ropes slither between your fingers, silken and warm. Soon, very soon, you can play again. The whimpering comes from a nearby box, exciting you.

Splatterpunk

Begun in the 1980s, **splatterpunk** began as a pushback against quiet horror. Several authors and creators believed this conservative approach to fear lacked an understanding of current affairs. However, unlike *psychological horror* and the new extreme, splatterpunk narratives are bombastic and frantic, more rollercoaster ride than haunted house. Its explicit nature revels in graphic sex, violence, and gore, while accenting them with satire and humor, bringing the world's horrors directly into the light and displaying them in all their hideous glory. When sadism began overshadowing its politically progressive commentary, the movement faded. Stories gradually became more "splatter" and less "punk." Although splatterpunk's irreverent tone can be disharmonious with ***KULT: Divinity Lost***'s complex and existential themes, its introduction can produce an interesting contrast against this somber atmosphere.

- **World**: After a chemical spill, contaminated mist chokes the city. People exposed to the fog are driven into primal states, indulging in deviant acts of sex and violence.
- **World**: A right-wing extremist returns to the airwaves, three days after his funeral. He urges his followers to purge the unfaithful from their One True Country.

- **Surrounding**: Villagers drug, torment, and rob travelers at the town's only diner. Afterwards, they take their victims to the woods, where something far, far worse waits.
- **Surrounding**: Corpses are found discarded under local bridges. They've been sexually violated, but new 'holes' have been drilled into them and then used by the killer.
- **Internal**: Your tongue laps at the bloody gash, filling you with coppery pleasure. The slippery knife will make more.
- **Internal**: You feel yourself getting wet while leafing through images of naked, disfigured bodies. These desires are wrong, aren't they?

Slashers

Slashers are enduring icons of extreme horror, featuring killers slaughtering hapless victims in brutally inventive ways. Unlike the previous entries, slashers rarely stray far from their formulaic narratives, where a group of individuals are hunted and murdered by an unrelenting antagonist. Although the settings may vary – from lonely farmhouses to abandoned islands – the plot generally remains the same. Stories focus solely on establishing body counts, and characters are merely plot devices. However, some modern slashers have broken this narrative mold by focusing on character and story development. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the GM can introduce supernatural aspects to the slasher tropes, elevating tired tropes by weaving the Realms of Death, Dreams, and Madness into their stories.

- **World**: The Bleeding Eye movie franchise has been connected to acts of extreme violence by its fans. The 'Eyes' act out the film's murder scenes while wearing the killer's signature mask.
- **World**: *Mr. Punch* stalks the city, paralyzing the citizens with fear. Striking without warning, he brutally beats mothers and their infants to death.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation starts receiving threatening phone calls. The voice taunts her, saying they are getting closer... closer than they can imagine.
- **Surrounding**: A corporate hunting trip turns deadly when *something* begins stalking them. The hunters become its trophies, gutted like animals.
- **Internal**: The knife wound throbs in your side. Blood squelches in his shoes as you limp toward the exit. You can make it. Just a little farther now.
- **Internal**: Your thumb caresses the axe blade. It's sharp and keen. Time to go to work.

THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

Extreme horror paints our world in bloody brushstrokes, revealing unspeakable acts in glistening colors. Despite the horrors revealed, the binary concepts of Good and Evil do not exist here. In this landscape of shadowy reflections, human behavior becomes both grotesquely fascinating and deeply troubling. When does madness excuse our sins? What lines can we cross to survive? When does love become an illness and hatred serves our best interests? In this realm of personal anguish and depravity, we are all villains and victims.

The following rogues' gallery of human sins and depravities are commonplace in extreme horror narratives. These unsettling behaviors and truths aren't limited to physical violence, but also sexual, psychological, and emotional violations. The GM can introduce them into the campaigns to add additional Threats, such as events, groups, and NPCs. These sins can also be incorporated to enhance and change current story elements, turning the familiar and safe on their heads. Players may question where their limits truly are and what boundaries they're willing to cross.

I Have Become Wrath

Revenge stories feature prominently throughout history, shaping our fiction and reality alike. Time and again, vengeance drives humanity to unspeakable acts, abandoning everything to achieve satisfaction. But at what cost? Even if we do not die during our vengeful quest, our souls are buried alongside those who harmed us. And what trauma does the avenger leave in their wake? What ripples do they send out, as they cut their swathe toward the guilty party? If they fail what consequences await them and their loved ones? Perhaps worse, if they achieve their ultimate goal, have they punished the right person – or did they simply murder an innocent in blind rage?

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, these questions become increasingly profound. Higher Powers, such as the Archon Hod and Death Angel Samael, feed off the chaos and pain caused by revenge. Rage and madness weaken the Illusion, condemning hunters and hunted to purgatories of their own making. Character traits like ***Nemesis*** and ***Oath of Vengeance*** can inspire entire narrative threads, which persist throughout the campaign. The GM can play opposing traits, such as ***Guilty of a Crime*** and ***Victim of Crime***, off one another, creating compelling stories between other PCs and/or Relations.

Furthermore, the vendetta's focus need not be human. The Illusion – and exterior forces – may twist perceptions and memories, guiding the PCs down false paths. Family, friends, or complete strangers may take offense at the PC's actions and turn against them. Flip the trope on its head and turn the PC inside out – consider the worst possible outcome and then push it one step further.

- **World**: Government soldiers kill a civilian, breaking the ceasefire with local militants. The region plunges back into open conflict, yet no one remembers what started the civil war.
- **World**: Violence escalates along the border, spilling over into rural communities. Revenge killings are committed daily, mostly by law-abiding citizens.
- **Surrounding**: A local doctor is found dead in his clinic, crudely vivisected with his own tools. The word *Murderer* is written in his blood.

- **Surrounding**: Metal drives through the joint in your middle finger, digging deeply into the wooden table. "This may not hurt you as much you hurt me," she says, lining up the next nail. "But we're going to try."
- **Internal**: You should have pulled the trigger when you had the chance. Now they're out there, waiting to tear your life and everyone in it apart.
- **Internal**: Your friend knows more than they're letting on about the experiments. You've seen the way they look at you. You feel their veiled guilt.

Pain Defines Us

Revenge stories are perhaps the oldest human narratives. They affect us on the most primal level, exposing our tragic souls. However, without torment, without pain, revenge narratives can ring false and hackneyed. In extreme horror, something truly monstrous must drive the avenger's rage, reinforcing their search for justice. However, while most inciting events are in reality, some characters may only *perceive* their injustices, driven to revenge by false pretenses. In either case, the event must distort them, pushing them out of their normalcy.

Typical victims are the character themselves, or one of their intimates. Furthermore, the tragic event doesn't merely wound the character, it transfigures them completely. Who they were beforehand and who they are afterwards are completely different people. How they proceed after this *moment of crisis* defines them, as well as the narrative itself. Yet, while this tragedy defines the character's future actions, it does not absolve them. In extreme horror, there are always consequences; the ultimate price they pay being very high.

- **World**: A botched military strike incinerates dozens of civilians, mostly children. Driven mad with grief, their families swear vengeance against all foreigners.
- **World**: Federal police disrupt an underground baby-factory, saving dozens of people from forced pregnancies. Afterwards, both saviors and survivors suffer from mental and physical trauma.
- **Surrounding**: The murderer forces their victim to beg for death, then prolongs their suffering indefinitely. Their torments leave little of either's humanity intact.
- **Surrounding**: Their leader smirks, gesturing with his pistol. "We're gonna watch you two fuck. So, give us a good show or you both die. And then we'll finish the job for you."
- **Internal**: No matter how much soap and water you use, you keep smelling *them* on your skin. Their stink and filth is still inside you, even all this time later.
- **Internal**: You cannot move, let alone fight. You're forced to watch and listen as they tear into your family. Every scream, every plea, every violation are yours to keep.

Violence Begets Violence

Violence is an *ouroboros*, perpetually feeding upon itself. One violent act inspires another, which provokes further retaliation in an unending cycle. This need for revenge stems from humanity's sense of justice and honor, as well as our inherent pride. If we lose what we love, we seek retribution to soothe our anguish. However, those we strike out against also have loved ones, hopes, and dreams. They respond in kind, violence answered with further violence. The Higher Powers feed this savage undercurrent in humanity, twisting our psyches with their Principles.

In standard revenge stories, achieving retribution typically frees the protagonist from their torment. In extreme horror, however, this catharsis is rarely achieved. Common themes included the misplaced vendetta, where the perpetrator's vengeance falls upon an innocent. In some cases, their response may be completely disproportionate to the instigating events. Others become so completely consumed by their vendetta, they destroy everyone around them, either by inviting retaliation or through their personal actions. Once the PC steps over the boundaries, there is no turning back and no happy endings await them. These Shakespearean tragedies further deepen the mental and physical trauma inflicted upon the victim and their relations. Their lives descend into madness and pain, adding additional layers of suffering to their horror.

- **World**: Riots erupt across several cities, as white nationalists and protestors clash in the streets. Entire neighborhoods are destroyed in the escalating violence. Many civilians are beaten, sexually assaulted, and killed.
- **World**: Several brutal attacks are penetrated against new parents and their infants. The only seeming connection is the attackers themselves – all of whom recently lost their child.
- **Surrounding**: The kidnapper returns your lover to you, one piece at a time. Each bloodless fragment is wrapped delicately and placed inside gold foil boxes.
- **Surrounding**: Someone begins harassing you. At first, the attacks are merely annoying, but soon turn deadly. They blame you for something, but you don't even know them.
- **Internal**: Their blood dries on your bruised fists. You want to scream. At them. At yourself. They weren't the one who hurt her.
- **Internal**: You need to hurt them. Why should they have the life you so richly deserve?

THE DEVIL BESIDE ME

We cannot truly know the people in our lives. Their desires and dreams remain mysteries to us, even when our loved ones express them. We're forever separated from others, divided by differing perceptions that are defined by culture and circumstance. We cannot gaze into one another's soul and see the shadows lurking there. Our own inner darkness festers unseen and unknowable, until it finally bubbles to the surface like poison.

We're shocked when people we know and love reveal their hidden natures. We're outraged when those in positions of power and trust engage in unthinkable acts. As terrifying as their abhorrent actions may be, we're more unsettled that we did not recognize the devil standing beside us. We question our judgment and perceptions of society. We feel betrayed, as our worldview shatters, reaching the grim realization that *anyone* is capable of such wickedness. Even us.

- **World**: A conservative politician's systematic child abuse becomes public knowledge. He kills himself and his family rather than face the scandal.
- **World**: *Purgatorio*, an illegal streaming service, broadcasts an endless stream of plotless torture and degradation in nondescript locations. The tormentors are thoroughly mundane people.
- **Surrounding**: Police discover dozens of mutilated bodies beneath a quaint bed and breakfast. The unassuming proprietor claims she is H. H. Holmes, reborn.
- **Surrounding**: You peel back the bloodied mask only to reveal dull humanity beneath. His utter banality infuriates you.
- **Internal**: You found polaroids hidden behind the vent. Boys and girls, their faces twisted in heartbreaking confusion. How can you forget this?
- **Internal**: Don't tell them about the monsters you've killed. They'll never believe you. How could they hope to understand? You are alone.

Heart of Darkness

Humans are violent creatures, but the compulsion to hurt others runs far deeper in some people. This may stem from the desire for power and control, hedonism, and/or some sense of purpose. They may gain gratification and fulfillment from verbally, mentally, physically, and/or sexually abusing others. Some may view their violent behaviors as ordained, sacred, and justified. Some may suppress or redirect these instincts through other actions, such as arson and animal cruelty. But, in time, many succumb to their darkest natures, plunging into violence and depravity. In extreme horror, this is typically the domain of the serial killers, who fulfill their fantasies in the vilest ways imaginable.

Most humans possess empathy for those around them, understanding that harm done to others could easily be done to us. We actively work to prevent harm for this and other reasons. However, some never truly grasp the concepts of right and wrong. Something inside them is broken or missing, depriving them of remorse and sympathy. Worse, they may consciously justify their cruelty, dismissing their actions. No one and nothing is safe or sacred to them; they destroy without hesitation. They'll hurt others for profit, pleasure, or power. They may ignorantly inflict abuse because they think that's just the way things ought to be. When these motivations are presented believably, they strike at our humanity, creating unnerving narratives.

- **World**: A local militia houses hundreds of evacuees inside an abandoned stadium to "preserve the peace." The militia blames the displaced people for the violence they endure while seeking refuge, insisting that the rapes, beatings, and stabbings taking place in the stadium are "people turning on each other" and not what they call a "target rich environment."
- **World**: A group of avant-garde theologians, *The 13th Psalm*, commit blasphemous acts of physical and sexual torture against innocents. They seek to offend God enough for him to manifest and punish their crimes. They hope to prove His existence through this desperate act.
- **Surrounding**: The hospice closes after its head nurse is discovered killing her wards and stealing their social security checks. Patient complaints went ignored by authorities for years before this.
- **Surrounding**: A youth is arrested for beating his younger sibling to death while babysitting. He calmly states that she didn't want to watch his show.
- **Internal**: They aren't obeying you. Dissent cannot go unpunished. They have to learn better. If they don't listen to your words, then use your fists. Uphold your honor.
- **Internal**: The fire calls to you. Offer your pain to the flames. Burn it away. Burn everything.

Barbed Words

With time, bruises and scars can fade. But words can leave the deepest wounds, forever shaping who we are. Mental abuse cripples the soul. Constant insults, snide remarks, and extremist rhetoric can become so common that the victims simply accept their torture. In many cases, mental abuse is inflicted by those we trust the most: our family, friends, and lovers. They teach us our cultural, spiritual, and political ideologies, altering our perceptions of the world and the people in it. Our prejudices twist us, making us hate others and even ourselves. To the outsider, our abusers may appear charming and friendly, even loving. It isn't until we're behind closed doors that their barbed words lash us like whips. We become secluded, cut off by lies and misunderstandings from those who could help us. In extreme horror, this mental torment frequently leads to rage and self-destruction.

- **World**: The TV doctor taunts his guests for not conforming to medical norms. The audience snickers and hoots, joining in on the bullying.

- **World**: The pastor and his flock tour the country, protesting outside of funerals. They sling insults at the mourners, blaming their deceased loved ones for infecting the country with their "degeneracy".
- **Surrounding**: Your childhood friend is unrecognizable under the tattoos. They announce his white supremacist leanings. He spouts an endless stream of hateful language, trying to enlighten you.
- **Surrounding**: Her mother smiles affectionately, pushing the girl's plate away. "No man will love you if you keep eating like that, dear."
- **Internal**: Your wife's words tighten around your heart. "*No one else respects you. Why should I? If only you were more like Steven.*"
- **Internal**: Your sinful thoughts are the Devil's work. Deny your perversions. You must only love who God tells you to. If you don't, then hell awaits.

The Smallest Assassins

Children are capable of extreme acts, such as animal cruelty, cyber bullying, mental torture, and physical violence – even murder. Many adolescents are unrestrained by the concepts of mortality or restraint, while others learn their aberrant behavior from their personal experiences. Children also exist outside the social order, being seen but not heard, operating without impunity or suspicion. Older children must also deal with their changing bodies, overwhelmed with new sensations, thoughts, and feelings. Lacking experience, they lash out at the world or themselves. Others gain an unnatural sense of entitlement, indulging in their desires and yearns without fear or limitations. In extreme horror, repulsive monsters hide behind rosy cheeks and innocence smiles.

- **World**: A foreign aid group are found butchered. The one survivor explains that their attackers were the orphaned children they were sent to protect. They delighted in the depraved tortures, acting without any form of empathy.
- **World**: An electronic social group for youths maintains a regimented hierarchy. Its higher echelons require members to commit increasingly deviant and violent acts – posting proof of their exploits. This evidence is used to keep them in line.
- **Surrounding**: A teen and his friends rape and torture their classmate over several weeks, keeping them locked in family basement. The teen's parents ignore the continued assault and pleas for help, too afraid of their own child.
- **Surrounding**: An eleven-year old girl lures small children into the local woods, where she kills them and adds them to her doll collection. Extremely intelligent, she knows enough to leave clues to implicate local sex offenders.
- **Internal**: While going through some old junk, you discover your killing jar. Skeletal remains from its last victim rattle in the bottom, stirring old desires.
- **Internal**: In the dark, you'd find ways of hurting your sibling, making them pay for your parent's love. That love that belongs to you.

OWN WORST ENEMY

Humanity's destructive tendencies do not only extend outward, but inward as well. We unconsciously seek to undermine ourselves, reinforcing negative beliefs and avoiding situations and relationships that could enrich us. We engage in destructive – even deadly – behaviors, seeking out harmful activities that will endanger us further. Addictions, self-injury, and suicide are our most common roads to perdition. In extreme horror, these negative behaviors obliterate multiple lives with tragic consequences, inviting endless suffering for the afflicted, and spilling over to consume those around them.

Self-destructive behaviors frequently stem from previous traumas and ongoing mental disorders. These instigating factors are discussed more thoroughly in ***Prisoners of the Self*** (p. 222). However, in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, many of these will manifest from the PCs' Disadvantages and Dark Secrets. GMs can construct narratives around them, introducing increasingly desperate and harrowing opportunities for the PCs to endure and suffer. Succumbing to their self-destructive tendencies, the PC spirals downward into their personal nightmare, opening new story arcs to be explored.

Hollow Hearts

A vast emptiness exists within us, an ache yearning to feel something – *anything*. In an attempt to fill this hungry void, we indulge ourselves in fleeting pleasures and deaden our emotional anguish with dangerous pursuits. We deny our true selves, masking them behind substance addictions, such as alcohol, narcotics, and prescription drugs. Everyday behaviors can be taken to extremes as we consume our waking moments with eating, exercise, sex, and work. Even when we recognize our self-harm, it is easier to wallow in familiar comforts than strive toward an uncertain future. No matter the consequences to ourselves and those we love, our hollow hearts remain untamed and insatiable.

- **World**: A prescription painkiller is recalled due to its habit-forming properties. However, tens of thousands are already addicted, turning to similar illicit drugs to relieve their dependence.
- **World**: Dozens of employees drop dead from working too much overtime in the same corporation over one week. Their families and friends report sudden changes in their behavior, each victim becoming obsessive and distant.
- **Surrounding**: The 24-hour gym *XI* gains popularity overnight. Staff and patrons undertake extreme health regimes. Several members have ended up hospitalized from their "training".

- **Surrounding**: Your Relation meets up with her dealer, blindly seeking her next fix. She needs the sweet sanctuary of heroin, and will offer anything – even you – to obtain it.
- **Internal**: You logged on three hours ago, but you hardly notice. Your body reeks of sex and desperation, still unsatisfied.
- **Internal**: Just one last game. You can't give up; not after you've pawned everything. How can you face your daughter? One perfect hand and you can get it all back.

Darker Impulses

Horror and sensuality are intimately connected. In extreme horror, our passions are rarely contained, displayed violently and without remorse. These narratives not only reveal parts of our true selves, but further corrupts and defiles them. Be they influenced by nature, nurture, or the Principles, our passions transcend conventional concepts, testing the boundaries of pleasure and pain. In this realm of transgression and paraphilia, nothing is forbidden. Its common themes include bestiality, extreme fetishism, necrophilia, pedophilia, and nonconsensual sadism. Many extreme narratives cross these borders, revealing hideous truths. The PCs themselves are just as likely to be survivors of these terrible acts as they are to be perpetrators.

However, the GM must strongly adhere to the *Horror Contract* when exploring these themes. Sexuality can be an uncomfortable subject even when sexual violence isn't involved. Furthermore, she should avoid the lingering gaze and/or utilizing these narratives simply to achieve *revulsion*. Otherwise, the story descends into obnoxious parody, losing its true effect and purpose.

- **World**: An elite catering service, *Salo's Banquet*, offers extreme weekend events for its clientele. Any pleasure is provided, no matter how grotesque or illegal. Confidentiality is guaranteed.
- **World**: A funerary corporation secretly auctions off bodies. Specialized preservation techniques assure their product's youthful appearance.
- **Surrounding**: She fervently begs her doctors to remove her hands and feet. She yearns to be reduced to blessed helplessness, becoming a "gift" for her lover.
- **Surrounding**: The handcuffed body lies face down in a cold pool of semen and blood. Someone drove nails into their skull while sexually assaulting them from behind.
- **Internal**: Beneath your clothes, the needles dig into your skin, igniting joyous pain. You hope a wayward crimson stain won't expose your guilty secret.
- **Internal**: Vivid dreams assail you each night, promising conjoined flesh and pleasure. You yearn to be bound in exquisite torment. Each morning, the word *Cairath* rings in your soul, calling from beneath the streets.

Cupio Dissolvi

Be it consciously or unconsciously, many seek their dissolution, desiring self-destruction. We punish ourselves out of maddening guilt and self-hatred, cutting our flesh and rending our minds. Our nihilistic souls are fed by the suffering around us, embracing futility and hatred over hope and trust. Our lives crumble through apathy, despair, and discontent. We're consumed by blind obsessions and smothered desires. In our despair, we yearn for release from our mortal prison, seeking the comforts of oblivion. For extreme horror, these masochistic tendencies extend far beyond the individual, with antagonists inflicting unspeakable pain on the world that betrayed them.

- **World**: Survivors from the terrorist attack begin committing suicide in gruesome and painful ways. Many claim they shouldn't be alive and must heed the *Summons*.
- **World**: Country-wide, people gather to celebrate the festival of *Ochpaniztli*. Over five days, they commit acts of self-harm and mutilation, offering their sinful flesh to the goddess Tlazolteotl.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation becomes obsessed with their new boss, who mentally, verbally, and physically tortures them. They find this non consensual forced submission safe, somehow.
- **Surrounding**: A couple murders their youngest child, who suffered from chronic illness. They hide his body for several months, pretending to be him on social media to elicit further financial assistance from crowd-sharing sites.
- **Internal**: Your blood-tinged vomit fills the public toilet. Shit and piss cake the floor, yet the cold tiles soothe you. How'd you get here? Who cares? You need another drink.
- **Internal**: Stinking sheets tangle around you. Semen and spit encrust your supplicated flesh. Who shared your bed? Do you even care anymore?

THE REALITY OF PAIN

In our current media culture, bodily injuries are frequently glossed over or ignored. Protagonists are beaten, bruised, stabbed, and shot, yet they get up and continue regardless. Many roleplaying games treat PCs as walking stacks of hit points, able to function normally, even when close to death. Similarly, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** includes the **Harm** system, which roughly gauges the PC's status and health. Although this mechanic reflects the body's degeneration, it rarely reflects the inescapable truth – being injured *hurts*. A lot! Yet, pain isn't – and cannot be – adequately represented through penalties to rolls or status descriptors.

As part of its mythology, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** explores the horrors inflicted upon the flesh and mind. Pain and suffering are integral to its themes and narratives. Removing these concepts in exchange for grazes and 'hero-wounds' eliminates narrative consequence and diminishes the sense of fear. If protagonists can walk through hails of bullets, bleeding but effectively unscathed, their story loses emotional impact. A PC's ultimate fate should always be in question, adding to their player's overall tension.

Furthermore, extreme horror comes from empathizing with the PC's suffering. When portrayed properly, we *personally* recoil from the violence, imagining the character's agony as our own. However, as discussed previously, this should never be pain and gore for the sake of sensationalism. Such grotesqueries are irreverent and even detrimental to the plot. Instead, pain roots us in reality, revealing our world's impartial cruelty. It exposes the fragility of life and, in turn, confirms its deep significance.

While portrayals of meaningful violence can be accomplished in literature and cinema, they can be problematic in roleplaying games, which are structured and organized according to mechanics and narrative flow. The GM needs to properly balance between exploring the significance of violence and advancing their story – as well as maintaining player agency.

- **World**: Photos from the aid station document children wounded during the bombings. One resembles a broken doll collection, full of stacks of tiny amputated limbs, caked in blood and flies.
- **World**: Outgunned, the police can't contain the firefight. It spills out onto the street, where stray bullets strike civilians as they flee.
- **Surrounding**: Strips of meat and muscle hang from their forearm. Even if you bind the crippling wound, they struggle to stay conscious. Shock isn't far away.
- **Surrounding**: Their face bounces off the linoleum, teeth and blood exploding outward. They remain still. Then they violently spasm, as if an electric current has been passed through them.
- **Internal**: With every breath, your chest fills with shards of agony. Darkness intrudes upon the edges of your vision.
- **Internal**: Blood pools around the jagged bone, its white speartip rising from your torn leg.

The Fragile Form

Severe injuries inflicted by melee and ranged weapons are often downplayed, particularly when dealing with protagonists. Heroes can be shot, stabbed, and beaten within an inch of their life, only to walk away bloodied and bruised but no worse for wear. Although ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** somewhat addresses this issue with **Serious Wounds**, the **Harm** system still lacks the 'reality' some GMs wish to reflect in their narratives.

Severe injuries can have long-lasting effects and dire consequences, ranging from scars to missing limbs. Bullet wounds are devastating to human bodies, leaving permanent cavities, shattered bones, and damaged organs. Bladed weapons slice flesh, tendons, and muscle. Blunt force traumas break vertebrae, crush vital structures, and cause brain damage. Various environmental effects can dramatically alter perfusion – the delivery of blood to organs and tissues. All of these can leave lasting effects. Even if the victim survives, their bodies may never heal properly, requiring extensive and prolonged treatments, such as reconstructive surgeries or amputations.

When assessing **Serious Wounds**, the GM may inflict additional and lingering effects depending on the severity of the injury. Certain injuries may translate into new physical and mental Disadvantages for the affected PC. Potentially crippling injuries should involve player consent, as they can fundamentally change how the PC interacts with the world. Similarly, if the GM inflicts more severe and long-lasting injuries, they should provide PCs opportunities to overcome, or learn to live with, these obstacles. They can also incorporate the injury into the Intrigue Map as an Event, introducing connected story elements. The concepts discussed in ***The Cure is Worse*** (see p. 204) may offer additional inspiration.

The GM can also introduce new narratives for the wounded PC, allowing them to explore the injury in different ways. For example, after an incapacitating head wound, *The Artist* loses their eye-sight. While coping with their blindness, they notice subtle auras and strange images. Soon, they learn they can ***See Through the Illusion***, even though they're blind to the normal world. What do they see?

- **World**: A dozen missing people are rescued from captivity. Their bones have been broken and reset, trapping them in crude, painful shapes.
- **World**: *The Southyard Killer* swabs their victims' tongues and eyes with drain cleaner, permanently silencing them. Any victims unfortunate enough to survive this treatment are then tortured to death.
- **Surrounding**: Severely beaten during their sexual assault, your Relation's chances of walking again are very slim. They ask you to burn their collection of running shoes.
- **Surrounding**: As promised, the doctor's flesh-grafting procedure repairs your burns. Later, someone recognizes your new face, reacting with confused horror.
- **Internal**: The bland broth offers no satisfaction. You've been hungry ever since they removed part of your gut to repair the gunshot wound.
- **Internal**: You *need* to scratch your itching foot. But it's no longer there. It was taken from you months ago.

Pain as Consequence

With suffering comes consequence, continuing long after the initial pain and injuries fade. Too often, game mechanics ignore the concept of pain, pushing it into the background. In extreme horror, when the PCs endure an injury, the player should have time to realize how serious it is. This focuses them in the moment, revealing the true dangers and the dire circumstances yet to come. Pain should hold narrative consequence and weight, resonating throughout the story. When our blood flows and agony robs us of our senses, we're reminded of our mortality and impending death.

In many circumstances, even minor injuries can have tragic consequences. Open wounds can turn septic, poisoning our blood. Illness can weaken and kill us within days, even hours. Sprained wrists or ankles can impede our movement. Narratively, the GM can reflect these consequences through her various Moves, creating additional challenges to be overcome. When action has significance, there is tension and fear. As the PCs endure these hardships, the players are pushed to make harsh decisions, as well as reassess the risks they're taking.

- **World**: Following the crash, most of the survivors are left injured, with broken bones, concussions, lacerations, etc. They eventually freeze to death, unable to outpace the storm.
- **World**: Cholera breaks out in the camp, spreading like wildfire. After weeks of malnutrition, the refugees have little strength left to ward off the infection.
- **Surrounding**: Something pulses beneath the wound. Something *alive*. They start shivering, despite the heat radiating off their body.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation moans softly, clutching their belly. They'd only complained about lightheadedness an hour ago. Now you realize they're bleeding internally.
- **Internal**: The stab wound in your armpit blinds you with agony. You can barely think, let alone move your arm.
- **Internal**: The sprained ankle throbs inside your boot. You're slowing with every pained step. You'll never make it.

The Revelations of Suffering

Pain makes us vulnerable, revealing who we are beneath the surface. In narratives, lasting wounds can serve as metaphors, reflecting the PC's true personality. For example, a vain person becomes maimed; the scars reveal their inner ugliness. Furthermore, like player characters, NPCs aren't immune to the effects of mental and physical trauma. Pain and injuries alter who they are, and how they act. In this manner, violence – and the effects thereof – need not simply be represented mechanically, but narratively as well. Additionally, the PC's suffering can become an instigating trigger for internal change, altering their motivations. Through revelations of suffering, violence comes to have true meaning.

- **World**: The *God's Hands* militia were formerly slaves in the conflict diamond mines. Now, they terrorize the countryside, backing off the limbs of mine owners to match their own hobbled bodies.

- **World**: A coalition of acid attack survivors grows in political power. They push for changes in assault, harassment, and stalking laws. The group's founder remains unseen, recruiting ardent members for their inner circle.
- **Surrounding**: You hardly notice their burst of expletives. The stink of rot clings to them. The bandages are dark with blood and pus, left unchanged for some time. Where have they been?
- **Surrounding**: He touches his swollen eye again, flinching. The cracked orbital bone hasn't healed right. How could a *woman* mark him so?
- **Internal**: You fumble with the paint brush, eventually tossing it away, betrayed. Your fingers haven't moved right ever since the incident.
- **Internal**: You rub the scars striating your knuckles. Shame squeezes your chest, as you remember their tortured pleas. But you'd kept hitting them until your blood mixed with theirs.

A Corpus of Paradoxes

Our pain endures beyond death. In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, humans die and are reborn into new flesh. Our identities are stripped apart and rebuilt by the Higher Powers – yet our divinity remains unchanged, albeit suppressed. Or does it? After countless reincarnations, how can we trust that our original soul remains intact? What is truly lost in the Black Cells, the Oubliettes of Forgetfulness, and our personal purgatories? What aspects and traumas cling to us when we return? Can pain define who we truly are?

Much like the Ship of Theseus, is our soul still our soul after being torn down and rebuilt after countless incarnations? Did we lose ourselves completely when the Demiurge imprisoned us, or do past wounds linger on, guiding us in this life? We may never know. One thing is for certain, though: some pieces of ourselves aren't fully scrubbed off. These wounded fragments may lay dormant within our current incarnations, intimately bound to us through Time & Space. In times of stress, these splinters may resurface, altering our perceptions and memories.

- **World**: Seemingly random people abandon their normal lives, traveling to an ancient burial mound. Once there, they fall into a comatose state. Several die from dehydration before authorities can cordon off the area.
- **World**: The Brooks Foundation provides in-depth research into people's genetic ancestry and historical records. They also provide past-life regression to their members, but many sessions leave the 'patient' mentally scarred from witnessing past tortures, violations, or deaths.
- **Surrounding**: You find your Relation digging holes in their dirt basement. They claim their body is buried there, somewhere. They need to find it and silence the voices from under the floor.
- **Surrounding**: The child grabs their friend's hair, then slams their face into the sidewalk. With every blow, they repeat two words in a language they shouldn't know: "*Never again*."
- **Internal**: After the fall, your arm hangs loosely. Pain spears along its length. In that instant, everything beneath the elbow disappears, replaced by ragged tendons and skin. Cannon fire and screams echo around you.
- **Internal**: Phantom needles pierce your back, leaving whorls of agony. *It's branding you*, you think in panic, *it's claiming you as its pet*. Outwardly, your skin remains unharmed.

CHAPTER 8

NEW FLESH, ANCIENT DESIRES

AIDEN'S HEART ACHED, REMEMBERING THEIR LAST WORDS, BITTER AND false. So long ago, now. Would she forgive him? Could he forgive himself? He opened the apartment door, revealing the room beyond. Immediately, his mind struggled to understand what he was seeing. His former home had fallen into chaos, detritus and rotted food piled high. At the center, something dwelled.

Dozens of legs quivered like an anemone's alluring fronds. Fat shelves supported rows of sagging breasts. Countless arms adorned with phallic fingers explored these shapes with mounting pleasure. Atop this deformed mountain, Cheryl's gentle face swayed back and forth. Black hair clung to her skin, unwashed and freckled with sores. Her eyes flickered open. A dull smile rose. "Aiden?" His head swam with scents of sex and decay. "Cheryl?"

The Cheryl-Thing extended its doughy arms. "You came back." Moist slits parted its upturned palms, revealing delicate mouths. They spoke in union, "You said you would always love me." Aiden dimly nodded, stepping forward. Obscene fingers caressed his cheek. He closed his eyes, sinking into her warm embrace. "Always," he whispered.

OVERVIEW

We possess an instinctual fear of changes to our bodies, which constrain and define us so intimately. ***New Flesh, Ancient Desires*** examines transgressive assaults on the flesh, specifically known as body horror. Also called *organic* and *venereal horror*, these narratives expose the Flesh's true nature, exploring and redefining its boundaries. Within the Realms of Passion and Madness, visceral terrors and sensual pleasures can be attained with equal measure. When our temples of sensation and self are altered, we know true fear – or realize our darkest desires.

TEARING DOWN THE TEMPLE

Due to its grotesque and violent content, cinema and literature frequently confuse *extreme horror* with *body horror*. However, extreme horror narratives explore purposeful harm to one's body by an exterior force. Typically, these stories lack the internally personalized concepts and themes more prevalent in body horror. As such, they are explored elsewhere (see *Disturbing Behaviors*, p. 178).

SUMMARY

No Flesh Shall Be Spared: The core narrative concepts of body horror.

Body and Mind: How body horror affects us mentally and physically.

Psychoplasmics: How beliefs and perceptions manifest on the human form.

We are the Gateway: How humanity allows outside influences to physically manifest.

Our Traitorous Flesh: How our bodies betray and revolt against us.

Tearing Down the False Temple: How we defy the failings and limitations of the Flesh.

More Human Than Human: How we transcend our flesh and become something more.

Fate Worse Than Death: How the Flesh can become our undying prison.

NO FLESH SHALL BE SPARED

When the Demiurge imprisoned humanity, he enclosed us body and soul. As with the parable of Adam and Eve, the Illusion remolded our corporeal forms like clay, dividing us into various genders, and trapping us inside mortal skins. Encased within meat and muscle, blood and viscera, humanity has been denied the Flesh's former malleability and freedom to be remade according to our desires. Now, most people fundamentally believe themselves to be immutable and temporal constructs. We instinctively fear our bodies and their frailties, rather than reveling in their complex beauty. We're terrified of our mortality, knowing our Flesh is finite and will ultimately betray us. The realm of body horror explores this fear at its most intimate level.

In truth, the Flesh offers infinite possibilities, twisted by anxiety and despair, molded by yearnings and desire. Delights and terrors await us in this embodied playground. Some are deprived of their bodies or must helplessly watch themselves mutating into something *else*. Others rebel against this biological tyranny, stripping away their skin to reveal the mysteries beneath. These revolutionaries of the Flesh are ostracized and shamed for their deviancy, as they are denying the natural order.

Despite the Illusion's constraints, the Flesh offers us the greatest chance at obtaining freedom – or damnation. Through these narratives, GMs and players can explore what it truly means to be human. Body horror isn't simply an exploration of the grotesque and shocking; it should transcend revulsion and evoke existential terror, both in the transformed and those around them.

Our Fragile Form Reflected

At its core, body horror reflects our fragile sense of self. The threat comes from within, changing us from who we once were into something alien. Yet, as our physical identity erodes, our humanity remains intact, locked inside our transfigured form. Reflecting this transfigurative fear requires a narrative that promotes empathy in the PCs (and, hopefully, the players themselves).

When the GM initially grounds the story in reality, the players become invested in the horrific events affecting their PCs. They experience the slow transition from the familiar to the monstrous, grieving their characters' suffering. Despite their revulsion and fear, they cannot turn away or recoil, as they are locked in to the transformation, becoming true participants rather than casual observers. Finally, the PC's former identity is denied to him, as he inexorably becomes the *other*. Who he was is forever lost, his former existence irretrievably altered.

THE UNCANNY VALLEY

Capturing the true essence of body horror relies heavily on invoking the *Uncanny Valley* – the point where our empathy transforms into revulsion and dread upon seeing something *almost human*. Much like our natural fear of the dead, humans are instinctively frightened and repulsed by supernaturally transmuted bodies. When we encounter the distorted form, our minds struggle to distinguish between what is human and what is something else. This unnerving ambiguity provokes disquiet and confusion, intensifying our paranoia. As such, the uncanny valley resonates throughout body horror.

Similarly, the GM should subvert the familiar, merging what is known and unknown. The horror in body horror comes not from seeing *what is*, but recognizing *what was*. The victim's humanity should remain perceptible, even if obscured beneath repellant transformations. Distort the human body, rather than destroy it, and purposefully defile the familiar. This intensifies the sense of loss; the person we loved is gone, yet they remain in a new, terrible shape.

- **World**: A trending influencer attributes her unusual new appearance to Subjectionism; a quasi-religious philosophy promoting physical transformation through positive thinking.
- **World**: Random acts of familicide are reported across the country. In each case, the perpetrators claim their family members were monsters in disguise.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation's face becomes flat and shiny, as if made of plastic – a mannequin's façade.
- **Surrounding**: People across the city begin wearing white surgical masks. Authorities say it is due to flu season, but you've seen the slit-mouthed grins beneath, ever-smiling.
- **Internal**: These hands no longer belong to you. They are unnaturally long with too many joints. They belong to someone else.
- **Internal**: Your reflection ripples like water, muscles and flesh moving of their own accord, before settling back into familiar solidity.

LINGER ON THE FLESH

We cannot escape body horror's intimate nature; its relentless progression continually reminds us of our mortality and vulnerability. The GM can reflect this by lingering on the victim's changing form, continually revealing new twists to their transcended Flesh. Utilize every sense to describe strange sensations, unpleasant smells, and unsettling sounds. Remind them of their former existence, even as their bodies betray them. Whenever they believe it can't get worse, show them it can.

As their body is denied them, the victim's mind transforms as well. Beyond pain and fear, they're assailed with new thoughts and desires. New and alien impulses tempt them from inside their altered form. Worse, they may find themselves denied physical agency and autonomy, helplessly forced deeper into their own minds.

- **World**: An unknown fungal infection inflicts victims with insomnia, swollen eyes, and dry mouth. At its final stage, the eyes pop out of the head like swollen red berries on stalks.
- **World**: A grainy Internet video shows living carpets of undulating bodies, bound and melded together like melted dolls. Despairing voices plead for release.
- **Surrounding**: Clumps of oily hair, teeth, and nails litter the hotel's tub, clogging its drain with their ammonia stink.
- **Surrounding**: Fat nipples freckle your lover's belly and sides, each swollen tip beading with milky blood.
- **Internal**: Don't touch yourself down there. The pustules have broken, oozing rancid grease.
- **Internal**: Pain flares as you strip the skin away, blood pooling along its ragged edges. Beneath the dead, scaly skin, you see something sleek and sensual, glistening crimson.

Body and Mind

Outwardly, body horror inspires revulsion and trauma through the violation of the human form. These defilements can be inflicted through injuries, metamorphosis, and mutation, as well as the effects of extreme emotions. Despite its external manifestations, body horror remains a primarily psychological – and internal – type of fear. We're assailed by the psychological pain and terror of our degenerating bodies. In essence, we're denied our individuality and self-control as we become something monstrous. Perhaps worse, our transformed bodies place us outside of society, cutting us off from humanity.

As discussed above, we instinctively respond to the *humanness* trapped beneath the transformed body with primal dread and paranoia. We recognize the terrifying implication that this could happen to *our* bodies. We fear disease, sickness, and deformity, recoiling from them. This existential terror is fueled not by our fear of death, but from the realization that true suffering is potentially worse. Indeed, even if we survive, will we remain human afterwards?

Agency

We inherently fear the loss of *agency*, physical or mental. Body horror deprives us of both, as our flesh and minds are mutated and warped. These involuntary changes alter our identity into something unrecognizable. Change through decay, transmutation, or physical injury denies us self-control, whittling us away until nothing familiar remains. With each passing day, our bodies betray us, spiraling downward toward dissolution. Disease robs us of our freedoms and abilities, even as our consciousness remains horribly aware, trapped inside our failing Flesh. Death becomes our welcomed liberator, not our feared destroyer. Traumatic wounds and desecrations leave us enfeebled and helpless, confining us deeper inside our corporeal prisons.

- **World**: The new street drug, *Primal*, causes extreme lymphedema. Addicts are almost always permanently incapacitated, unable to move their painfully swollen and fluid-filled limbs.
- **World**: An outbreak of sleep paralysis strikes random people, locking victims into unnatural poses, their faces twisted into rictus masks.
- **Surrounding**: They plead to you from beneath their tumorous flesh. You can't tell if they're saying, 'Help me,' or 'Kill me.'
- **Surrounding**: Bereft of limbs, he wriggles like an overturned turtle. His chafed skin leaves a wet, pink trail on the linoleum.
- **Internal**: Your head pounds, the white-hot agony erasing all your senses. You fight the urge to smash your skull against the wall. *They want out.*
- **Internal**: Smooth flesh replaces your mouth and nostrils. Your left eye is next to go. Soon, you'll be locked in darkness.

Identity

Similar to agency, we instinctively fear the loss of our *identity*. As our bodies decay and change, our minds can reflect these transformations in kind. When our Flesh is invaded, our true identity comes into question, subsumed by our fears and transmuted bodies. New feelings, sensations, and thoughts assail us, altering and degrading our personalities. The people we love may become something else beneath the skin, their familiar faces nothing more than masks. Our desires may translate to our bodies, bubbling up, desperate to emerge and reveal who we truly are, no matter how unspeakable.

We may be deprived of our identities through other forces, such as dementia, disease and possession. Although our bodies remain physically intact, our minds and souls are horribly altered. The Flesh becomes a hollow reminder of the person we were. Thus, psychological decay offers highly personalized narratives, transcending the physical themes of body horror.

- **World**: Perfectly healthy people report suffering *phantom limb syndrome*, feeling body parts no longer present. However, they describe missing inhuman appendages.
- **World**: After visiting the ReNuYou Clinic, several celebrities and socialites engage in deviant behaviors. Their physical appeal becomes irresistibly hypnotic, heightening their popularity.
- **Surrounding**: You've seen them at night, stalking the streets, whispering to themselves about how hungry they are. They don't look *right*.
- **Surrounding**: Your normally timid friend presses against you with fervent ardor. Their skin radiates with feverish heat, smelling like overripe flowers.
- **Internal**: The life inside you pushes outward again, filling more spaces with its presence. Soon, there'll be nowhere left for you.
- **Internal**: You don't want to be trapped in this body. It's not you. You want to be something else. You choke on this feeling.

Isolation

Deformity and illness separates us from society, marking us as the *other*. Shunned and reviled for our otherness, we're often forced to retreat from humanity when we need them the most. In contrast, transformation infests us with dread and paranoia as we desperately seek to maintain our identity. We dare not trust those different from us, as their otherness may change us as well. This divisive cycle of fear and suspicion isolates us even further, compounding our torment.

In contrast, our otherness can create communal bonds, driving the afflicted to seek out their own kind. We share our condemnation, where monsters live without judgment. Those who've transcended the Flesh are welcomed, free to share their desires and dreams. Instead, humanity becomes the outsiders, treated with animosity, distrust, and fear. These narrative themes are frequently associated with Madness magicians and Children of the Underworld.

- **World**: Rumors circulate about an isolated resort that accepts the *remade*, as well as those seeking to leave the old Flesh behind.
- **World**: An entire township is cordoned off after residents start developing physical irregularities. Health officials refuse to comment, and all communications are suppressed.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation's home is abandoned. In the bathroom, suits of dried skin are neatly folded on the counter. A sticky note accompanies each one, reading, "Day 1... Day 4... Day 9..."
- **Surrounding**: The bouncer's gaze drifts over you; rectangular pupils constricting. His frown reveals serrated teeth. "You're not our kind. I'll only warn you once."
- **Internal**: They reshaped your body to match their perfect image. How can you go back to the outside world?
- **Internal**: The trailer park is where you belong. Beyond its fences, the Smoothies hate and hurt people like you.

Transcendence

Be it voluntary or involuntary, transformation offers us new insights into who we are and what we may become. Humanity once savored its corporeal fluidity, delighting in the Flesh's ultimate freedoms and pleasures. We defied natural boundaries, redefining petty concepts of shape, form, and gender. Upon our imprisonment, our bodies were constrained by biology, robbed of their ability to change and evolve. Yet, they *remember*.

Humanity recognizes the physical limitations placed upon us and yearns to surpass them. Although we fear monsters, we also recognize our kinship with them. We marvel at their beauty and power, and envy their freedoms. Like splinters under the skin, our need for physical transcendence itches and taunts us. When we cast aside our fear and shame, we rediscover our lost legacy.

- **World**: The death metal band, *Surman Suuhun*, tours the country, igniting controversies with their transhumanist ideals and philosophies. Many of its devotees claim to have achieved immortality through their practices.
- **World**: The Forgotten God Phantasus consecrates the flesh of its sleeping devotees, who awaken in fantastical bodies. Heretics and apostates are transformed into horrifying monstrosities.
- **Surrounding**: Despite their apparent wasting illness, your Relation incessantly talks about their 'Becoming.' They're willing their future self into existence.
- **Surrounding**: Following their meetings, members of a veteran support group start exhibiting bestial and biomechanical mutations. Several eventually disappear without a trace.
- **Internal**: Scales rise from your weak flesh, muscles thickening and swelling. You've been weak for far too long. But never again.
- **Internal**: Peel back your useless skin. Cut away the corrupted meat. Allow your true humanity to be released.

PSYCHOPLASMICS

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the Flesh is integrally connected to the human psyche. We are reshaped and distorted by our fears and yearnings; our Madness and Passion literally manifest on and through our physical forms. In this way, the GM can supplement standard body horror themes of dissolution and degeneration, and utilize the body to reflect psychological concepts and narratives. The Flesh physically reflects our hidden desires and unconscious thoughts, revealing our secrets for all to see. Through these physicalized representations, characters can become living allegories.

Perceived Reality

Since our imprisonment, humanity has all but forgotten the organic fluidity we once possessed. On occasion, these dormant memories rise up, twisting our perceptions. We gaze upon human faces and recognize an inherent *wrongness* there. In some, this revelation inspires fear and revulsion. They desperately cling to the Flesh's purity, rebelling against any threats to its perfection. Others are instilled with an uncontrollable need to be transformed, casting aside their false visage. They seek to unshackle themselves from the Flesh's constraints.

The Illusion's deceptive influence continually mutes our perceptions of the True Flesh. Even when we are unshackled from its power, others remain wholly unaware of our transformation. As such, we may perceive our body dissolving into something *else*, but others remain completely ignorant. They dismiss our plight, categorizing it as delusion, only deepening our isolation and fear.

Conversely, while still in the Illusion, we cannot see what truly lurks beneath Reality's benign mask. Vile creatures walk amongst us as rarified beauties. Although we may instinctively sense something abnormal, we're denied the ultimate truth. Even when we gaze into the mirror, we see nothing. Only once the Illusion crumbles do we recognize the actual monsters in our midst.

- **World**: New biotech injections provide patients with serene expressions, heightening their natural beauty and obscuring all negative emotions. The treatment's popularity grows, even as bizarre side effects begin surfacing.
- **World**: Across the country, people secretly gather to engage in raucous sex. Lost to Passion, their bodies merge together, allowing them to share and trade their physical characteristics.
- **Surrounding**: They sit across from you at the restaurant, feeding greasy morsels into their twitching mandibles. Crumbs and drool spill over the flushed goiter drooping beneath their shiny chin.
- **Surrounding**: A local hotel hosts the *Therianthropic Society*, which offers seminars and discussions on unleashing one's inner natures. Several murders occur over the weekend; notable for the animalistic injuries inflicted.
- **Internal**: Why won't people believe you? Can't they see the monster you're becoming? They call you crazy, but soon enough, you'll cease to be human.
- **Internal**: Your teasing fingers dimple your belly, and then sink deeper. The flesh parts like warm clay, pleasure unleashing your imagination, urging you to remold yourself.

The Nightmare

One manifestation of our fears is body dysmorphia, where the sufferer obsessively believes some aspect of their appearance is flawed. This isn't simply due to low self-esteem and self-loathing. The sufferer perceives actual imperfections, even where there none exist. They believe their bodies are malformed and ugly, even when they're completely normal. In extreme cases, this delusion extends to seeing monstrous qualities or not recognizing themselves in the mirror. In turn, victims can actively harm themselves to maintain an ideal body, which leads to further damage and trauma.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, these problems can reshape our bodies. Our delusions manifest as physical alterations, reflecting our perceptions of reality. These changes may be temporary or permanent, rewriting our physicality into something horrific, revealing our sins, fears, and self-doubts. Worse, our perceptions may be unfettered as we see our true faces beyond the Illusion. Our monstrous forms show themselves, and the True Flesh reveals itself.

- **World**: A viral trend encourages people to emotionally regress and rewrite their lives. Several members physically infantilize themselves, much to the horror of their loved ones.
- **World**: Penitents claim that God has demanded they reveal their sins. As they confess, their bodies deform and mortify according to their transgressions. People near them too long soon hear the voice of this angry god as well.
- **Surrounding**: You find them slumped over the stationary bike. They've literally worked themselves to death. Their dead eyes remain locked on their mirrored reflection.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation reaches from the shadows, plucking the rancid meat from the floor.

The hand is supplicated with tubing and jagged glass. They whisper, "You should go now. Before I hurt you."

- **Internal**: Father was right. You're weak and empty. The gaping hole where your heart should be proves it.
- **Internal**: Don't look. That can't be you. You're not that thing staring back at you. Even though you want to be.

SELF-LOATHING

Our self-perception is deeply affected by those around us. The media assails us with perfected bodies and definitions of health. Social networks eye us constantly, driving us deeper into self-loathing and shame. Verbal assaults and teasing manifest as physical wounds. We may literally shrink away from degrading remarks, reduced to toad-like things. Dismissed and ignored, our faces may fade, erasing us from existence.

Similarly, emotionally troubled individuals may harm themselves as a form of maladaptive coping mechanism. This fleeting pain provides them relief and focus, yet soon inspires guilt and self-loathing – driving a cycle of self-harm. The further they sink into the harm-guilt cycle, the more ritualistic scars and injuries open on their bodies. Blisters and burns mar their flesh. Foreign objects manifest to rupture flesh, puncture muscles and organs, and drill through bone. Symbols and insults etch their faces and chests, revealing their hidden truths.

- **World**: The *Angayarkanni Center* treats victims of gender dysphoria. Through a special form of psychotherapy, patients physically manifest their true identities. Some never return from the gated community.
- **World**: A local gang murders parents and tortures their children. Its members bear strange deformities and painful stigmata.
- **Surrounding**: Following an ugly breakup, your Relation suffers from deep depression. They continually shrivel away, no matter how much they eat. Their skin becomes transparent, exposing the structures beneath.
- **Surrounding**: This figure lacks any human qualities. Under their stained hoodie, their face is completely smooth and featureless. They truly are the *nobody* people said they were.
- **Internal**: The mouth behind your head starts talking again; fat lips and tongue tangling in your hair. You could ignore its heartless accusations, if only it wasn't telling the truth.
- **Internal**: Wrap the bandages tight. Cover the scars. Hide the hateful words they spell out. No one must see. No one must know what you really think.

RAGE

Our inner demons lurk behind masks of civility, barely constrained by morality and self-control. Yet, these social boundaries are tenuous and cast aside with unnerving ease. Initially, our violent urges may manifest as antisocial behaviors, such as cruelty, suspicion, and sudden bouts of unwarranted fury. We lash out at the world and our loved ones with equal ferocity. Our grievances eat away at our souls, twisting them into cruel caricatures. We become primal and predatory, feeding the ravenous beast within. When this monster slips its restraints, it can consume us completely, wearing our flesh to inflict pain and suffering.

- **World**: An extremist group declares war against the country's immigrants and 'race traitors'. Its most violent members physically change, their faces devolving into skull-masks carved with fascist symbols.
- **World**: The Burning Man stalks the warzone, incinerating everything in his path. A living inferno, the immortal creature is little more than charred bone and blackened gristle.
- **Surrounding**: A disgruntled teen is arrested for murdering his sleeping parents. Police found him aimlessly wandering the streets, covered in gore. However, forensics points to the parents having attacked each other.
- **Surrounding**: The gunman stalks the nursing home, executing anyone standing between him and his elderly mother. Blood and pus ooze drip from the metallic shards erupting from his skin like protective barbs.
- **Internal**: They've betrayed you for the last time. Be the brute they've always feared. The Beast is finally loose.
- **Internal**: You flex your hand, examining the bony claws splitting your nails. Sink them into the bastard's throat and tear, tear, tear.

The Dream

Desires of the Flesh are intense, calling us to transcend its limitations. Many strive to achieve perfect bodies and defy the human condition. Many remember their true selves, obscured and suppressed by the Illusion. These transcendents seek to remake themselves and redefine humanity. They sculpt their bodies through cosmetic surgeries and health regimens, as well as extreme tattooing and body modifications. Yet, even these transformations can leave them wanting.

When our dreams overwhelm us, sexual neurosis and skewed self-perceptions can cause profound physical transformations. Excessive body builders and health devotees may devolve into primordial creatures of muscle and fury. Hyper-sexualized desires can warp the body into fantastic tableaus of pleasure and passion. Some completely abandon their humanity, assuming other guises of monstrous beauty and alien form.

- **World**: Romantic body modders, the Changelings use dream therapy and pharmaceuticals to unlock their hidden forms. Most were orphaned by Children of the Underground.
- **World**: Dr. Albreckt's beauty treatments results in patients suffering radical transformations. The psychologist's concept of 'attractiveness' does not adhere to conventional ideals.
- **Surrounding**: Spindly things crawl free of their cardboard nests. Once discarded people, they've now become hunters.

- **Surrounding**: From the doorway, they motion to you with long, sinuous fingers. The shadows cling to their willowy form. They could reach out and sweep you away, if only you'd let them. You're almost as afraid of refusing as you are of consenting.
- **Internal**: Sunlight bleeds through the curtains. You dreamt of transcending all corporeal restraints, devolving into pure desire. As dozens of eyes fully open, you dimly wonder if you are still dreaming.
- **Internal**: Your blood sings with fire. Each change moves you closer to perfection. Abandon banality and embrace your ascendance.

SINS MADE FLESH

We fear our sexuality as much as we long for its pleasures. We suppress our darkest desires, hiding them from ourselves and those around us. Yet, the Flesh yearns, constantly reminds of these unfulfilled longings. We indulge our paraphilias only in dreams or in private. As we lose ourselves to Passion's maddening grip, our façades fall away, revealing the true soul within. After the pleasure ebbs and cool, we may be left naked and ashamed.

Some desires cannot be restrained. They infest our waking moments, warping our psyches, and eventually our bodies. We yearn for the realms where sensation transcends meaningless distinctions like "pleasure" or "pain". We give ourselves over to primal hungers, letting them rule us. Their comforting embrace far outweighs the banality of our puritan societies.

- **World**: An author of erotic vampire fiction gains popularity, an entire subculture forming around their books. Ardent fans take the material as gospel, indulging in ritualistic sex. More exsanguinated bodies are discovered every day.
- **World**: Patrons of the *House of Milos* indulge in their partialism fantasies – worshipping body parts, such as eyes, breasts, hands, and legs. Regular members develop vestigial limbs, transforming into paragons of their desires.
- **Surrounding**: A perverse sculpture, the limbless thing exudes sex. On its feral, carnal face, a sphincter-like mouth quivers, begging, "Hurt me. Please. Hurt me."
- **Surrounding**: The body fuses with the chair's leather and wood. Stumped limbs serve as armrests, while legs and thighs are sewn together for cushioning. You recognize a butch masculine tilt to the stitched face.
- **Internal**: Your mouth and jaw tighten, losing definition. Lewd slits mark your former nose. The inability to breathe fills you with delicious panic.
- **Internal**: Your flesh molds itself according to someone else's needs. Be their dream. It is the ultimate surrender.

WE ARE THE GATEWAY

Although we cannot escape our bodies, they remain susceptible to outside influences. We can be invaded, infected, and violated, transformed into hosts for supernatural entities. Our flesh serves as clay to be remolded, vessels for their essence, or food to sustain them. We may invite their defilements, offering ourselves to their nefarious designs. Their insidious assault may go undetected until far too late. Once the monsters break into our sacred prison, we have nowhere to run.

Spiritual Transformation

Our souls and bodies are inextricable, but we may lose parts of them to exterior forces. Infernal beings can slip inside our minds, compelling us to do unspeakable acts. Doppelgängers syphon our strength and memories, depriving us of our lives. Entities from beyond Time and Space utilize our flesh to manifest in the physical world. Even without overt transformations, we're faced with the horrific realization that our bodies no longer belong to us. Soon, we can only gaze out through someone else's eyes.

While forced assimilations may be quick, many offer warning signs of the threat growing within. Before being fully possessed, victims may disrupt or dispel the invading force. This arduous task may require unusual materials, arcane items, and personal sacrifices. Our freedom may inflict a heavy toll, and we might be physically altered by the attack. Entire stories can be woven around these psychic struggles, exploring the PC's frantic efforts to maintain control of their bodies.

- **World**: After combating wildfires in the 'haunted' forest, volunteers succumb to high fevers, uncontrollable tics, and eventual paralysis. Upon recovery, they suffer profound personality changes and atavistic mutations.
- **World**: Revenge killings spread across the city. The vigilantes exhibit bizarre deformities, such as feathers, talons, and vestigial wings.
- **Surrounding**: Bloodied horns protrude from the ruined sockets, twitching, scanning like the eyes they've replaced. Jaundiced skin shreds with every lurching step until the thing inside shirks off its human disguise.
- **Surrounding**: After their vacation, your Relation's behavior becomes unrecognizable. Their timid nature has gone. Now, they engage in dangerous behaviors without safety nets, as though they have a death wish.
- **Internal**: The headaches are getting worse. Your ashen flesh crumbles away, muscles and tendons hardening like leather. It's stealing your life, killing you by inches.
- **Internal**: You wake up, entwined in sullied sheets. You don't recognize the hotel room, let alone whose blood and spit splatters your body.

Not of Nature

The natural world is rife with parasitism and symbiosis. Creatures live on us and within us, feeding and breeding, drawing our strength to sustain their existence. Some fungi and insects even control their host, altering their bodies and minds to propagate their species. Yet beyond the Illusion, far more insidious things await us. From Gaia and Metropolis, parasitic entities and sentient diseases seek out the warmest place to hide and grow – our imprisoned bodies.

Humanity's relentless expansion has defiled our world with pollution and poisonous waste. Our water and air are befouled, killing and mutating us with carcinogens and toxins. Our immune systems weaken and fail, succumbing to new diseases and parasites.

- **World**: Red tides devastate coastal regions, poisoning entire populations of fish and animal life. Infected humans suffer strange dreams and compulsions. Eventually, they walk into the ocean to drown, dissolving into new algae blooms.
- **World**: People suffer intense pain, muscle and weight loss, and hemorrhaging from the mouth and anus. Upon their death, yellow-white worms emerge from the hollowed out corpse, seeking new hosts.
- **Surrounding**: Fronds and strands of fungus fill the abandoned car, completely destroying its interior. Weak mewing escapes the tumorous mass on the driver's seat. Something moves beneath the living carpet.
- **Surrounding**: Children return from the abandoned playground with unsettling growths and physical changes. Each touched the foul-smelling liquid bubbling up from the sandbox.
- **Internal**: The sickly, sweet rot makes your stomach churn. No matter how much perfume and alcohol you use, the stigmata continue to fester and ooze.
- **Internal**: Since visiting the restaurant, you can't stop eating their food. You endlessly gorge yourself on take-out to satisfy the cravings. Your body loses definition, as limbs and torso transform into sagging rolls of fat.

The Enemy Within

Disease remains humanity's constant companion and tormentor, condemning us to intolerable suffering and illness. The Demiurge cursed us with this mortality of flesh, culling humankind through sickness and damaged genes. Viruses assail us daily, overwhelming our immune systems with every new strain. Genetic mutations twist our flesh and bones, as cancerous tumors infest skin and organs. Even with modern medicines, we remain forever at the mercy of disease. We fear contagion, isolating ourselves from the world and others. Time and again, we abandon our humanity to eradicate the sickness, even where there is none.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, our bodies can also become the home for far more insidious invaders. A myriad of viruses can overwhelm our bodies, entering us through contaminated food and drink, injuries, sexual contact, or simply breathing. Others are passed on through generations, lying dormant for years. No matter the source, these diseases can control our bodies, altering us beyond recognition. Those who venture beyond the Illusion face worse threats, as our immune systems remain wholly unprepared for the new and deadly illnesses there. We're slowly subsumed by them, our flesh sating their immortal hunger.

- **World**: A secluded team of biologists report discovering an undocumented fungi, now restored by the thawing permafrost. Contact abruptly ends after fragmented reports of contagious fungal meningitis.
- **World**: A smallpox outbreak ignites mass panic in the major city. Street prophets bless infected citizens in their god's name, *Baal Reshef*. These converts become asymptomatic carriers – alive, but horribly scarred.
- **Surrounding**: "Let us in. You can't believe the intimacy, the freedom," they say. Their throat inflates, as something forces their mouth open. A slick, phallic length presses over their lips, inching toward your face.
- **Surrounding**: The cancer curls and gnarls their bones like rotted tree roots. Every breath pains them, wracking their once-beautiful face with agony.
- **Internal**: You pull the stinking bandages back, exposing gangrenous rot. You can't ignore this anymore. You won't be one of *them*. Get the backsaw. Maybe it's not too late.
- **Internal**: Your stomach rumbles ominously. Tiny dimples rise and fall, as the snakes grow more restless.

PSYCHOSOMATICS

As discussed previously (*Psychoplasmics*, p. 198), people's thoughts and emotions can have physical ramifications on their body. Depression, fear, stress, and other mental disorders are exhibited as various illnesses through this mind-body connection. In extreme cases, these psychosomatic manifestations can degrade and deform the Flesh, and even take on lives of their own. Our bodies become the hosts for these apparitions, feeding them with our lifeblood and spirit until we're completely devoured and cast aside. More insidiously, as we feel our bodies and minds change, our anxieties and pain only fuel this infection further.

- **World**: The Ruby Plague sweeps through the nation. It is named after its symptoms – atopic eczema and peeling skin – and linked with chronic pain and sleeplessness. More advanced cases lead to manic episodes and self-harm
- **World**: Health agencies report localized clusters of pica, a psychological disorder that causes people to eat bizarre items. Sufferers crave carrion and develop physical mutations that allow them to consume larger 'food' items.
- **Surrounding**: They can't stop scratching their belly and chest, screaming, "*Get them off me!*" At first, you think they've gone mad, until you see the aphids crawling in their wounds.
- **Surrounding**: They lurch over, heaving. A torrent of crimson pours from them. Their chest and belly balloons, as writhing ulcers fight their way out.
- **Internal**: Even as your flesh fuses together, you refuse to move. Better to stay curled up beneath the sheets and forget the world that's betrayed you.
- **Internal**: The worms are moving again, creeping under your cheek, heading toward your eyes. You can't let them win. Take the knife and save yourself.

OUR TRAITOROUS FLESH

When the Demiurge locked our Flesh into singular forms, it condemned us to endless cycles of mortality. From our first breath, we begin our journey toward death, consumed by age and disease. Throughout this progression, our bodies endure physical transformations and degradations, triggered by hormones and cellular decay. These imperfect constructs betray us, robbing us of our physical strength and mental facilities. Even when we reproduce, the creature living within refashions us to serve its insatiable needs. Worse, the Higher Powers and lesser beings use this biological captivity against humanity, implanting new and terrible seeds in our bodies – waiting to harvest them when the time comes.

Death is not the End

Once our bodies relinquish life, death is the expected outcome. Some refuse to accept this ultimate release and stubbornly continue on. This undeath may originate from fears, intentions, diseases, or curses. In most cases, our minds and souls persist, even as our bodies rot around us. We are imprisoned, descending into torment, as we stare out through dead eyes. Some seek to obtain immortality through alchemy, magic, or technology, while rarely considering the grim consequences. Terrified sinners refuse to accept death, fearful of the punishments waiting beyond the Illusion. We soon discover the hells we denied would have been a welcome blessing, in comparison.

- **World**: Despite the politician's tragic death, they return to the public eye, regularly attending state functions. However, their appearance continually degrades until even their clownish makeup can't hide the putrefaction.
- **World**: *Viduus Cryonics* offers patrons advanced cryopreservation, utilizing nanomedicine to maintain neural networks and avoid vitrification. Rumors circulate about patients perpetually stuck at the point of death.
- **Surrounding**: The killer constructed laboratory space beneath his home, as well as cages for failed experiments – undead children he murdered to rebuild his lost family.
- **Surrounding**: The nightie lightly graces her gas-bloated form. Viscous fluids slicken her discolored thighs. With a nicotine smile, she pats the empty space beside her on the bed.
- **Internal**: Cramps wrack your body. Merely opening your eyes is agony. Ugly, purple bruises darken your skin, as blood pools in its lowest points.
- **Internal**: The disease is killing you by inches. The ritual will free you of this corrupted flesh. Is it truly a sacrifice? What's another person's life when compared to your own?

THE RISEN

Death magicians utilize undead as slaves and servitors. However, memories tend to fade after death, degenerating corpses into mindless and aggressive creatures, incapable of complex actions. As such, magicians harvest the recently deceased, typically, victims of accidents, suicides, and violence. These *Risen* retain their former memories and abilities, making them excellent servants. Although they can survive incapacitating wounds, the Risen lack the capacity to heal. Worse, as their bodies decay, they lose sensations and intellect, devolving into lumbering monsters. Physical damage allows the rot to progress faster, rendering them helpless.

Some Risen escape their resurrectionist's control, but know their bodies will inevitably fail them. Those 'lucky' enough to survive their undeath may become Revenants (see *KDL*, p. 358). To slow their decay, they use embalming fluids and preservation methods. Heavy perfume and makeup mask their putrefaction, allowing them to mimic life amongst humans.

Unnatural Selection

Prior to our imprisonment, humanity traversed the rapturous wonders of Gaia and beyond. These primordial realms required us to continually adapt and conform to their demanding environments. We crossbred with marvelous creatures, assimilated their unnatural traits, and remade ourselves to survive and thrive. These qualities remain dormant, woven into our very essence. In times of intense stress, our immutable forms remember our previous selves, waking up lost powers, and reshaping us into monsters. Indeed, these monstrous lineages resonate through our cultural heritage and media. Stories of therianthropy and skinwalkers fill us with fear and envy, reminding us of what we lost.

- **World**: Acts of terrorism target desert oil refineries and drilling rigs. Survivors claim the attackers are animalistic horrors, disappearing as quickly as they appear, dragging their victims beneath the sands.
- **World**: The New Atlantis Group harvests the polluted oceans for recycled materials. Its biotech department secretly enhances employees to survive in harsh marine environments.
- **Surrounding**: A figure crouches on the brick wall, cloaked in raven's wings. Its face is an elegant mask of ivory and bone, sunken eyes blazing with malice.
- **Surrounding**: Her lithe form slithers through the water, as if born to it. She dips below the waves, slapping her long tail violently before disappearing.
- **Internal**: You curl your long toes, marveling at their new flexibility and strength. Your shoulders and back aching though, forcing you to stoop over.
- **Internal**: Bird song and animal calls wash over you. You've found your home again. Abandon your convictions and worries. Recapture yourself.

TEARING DOWN THE FALSE TEMPLE

Once temples of the Flesh, our bodies were worshipped as paragons of biology and beauty. Thus consecrated, these malleable shrines reflected our desires and dreams without shame or fear. The Demiurge deprived humanity of this freedom, casting us down into immutable prisons of meat and blood, of time and frailty.

Yet, humanity continues to rebel against its biological destiny. We deny our mortal limitations, striving to regain our True Flesh and unlock its suppressed secrets. For these insurgents of corporality, established concepts such as beauty, gender, and biological restrictions confound and exasperate them. Out of desire or yearning, they seek to cast aside the shackles of absolutes and taxonomy, ascending above their prison.

These heretics employ rigorous physical regimens, radical medical procedures, and untested pharmaceuticals to tear down and rebuild their personal temples. Others deny biological destiny, transcending the Flesh through technology and supernatural means. They redefine themselves and the world in their own image. Many do not only seek their personal ascension, but humanity's as well.

- **World**: The virility supplement miraculously enhances men's libido and stamina. Yet, its creator takes great lengths to hide the drug's disturbing physiological and psychological side-effects.
- **World**: Advances in 3D-bioprinting help treat critically wounded soldiers. However, the rebuilt organs and tissue require biomaterials with unnatural properties and questionable origins.
- **Surrounding**: Another body is discovered; its skull deftly opened. After an autopsy, the coroner discovers the pituitary gland and surrounding tissue are missing.
- **Surrounding**: Following their autoimmune treatment, your Relation's body transforms, switching genders and appearance. And, then their personality changes to match.
- **Internal**: Pain is your life. The cancer is winning, imposing its will on everything you do. You're running out of options. Maybe it's time to listen to the *thing* in the cellar.
- **Internal**: As promised, the foul paste perfectly heals the wounds. You can't be sure, but you swear the skin looks younger. Maybe if you use more? But the price was so high...

The Cure is Worse

In our frantic search for wellness and immortality, humanity violates the Flesh's restrictions through medicine and biochemistry. We abandon the Hippocratic Oath, as the desire for knowledge perverts our ethics. Down these darker avenues of medicine, the body represents something to be explored, dissected, and studied. In the name of progress, pain and fear become acceptable consequences. Only the Greater Good matters. At least, that's how torments and terror are excused by 'rational people'. The broken and deformed are not victims, they are symbols of hope.

With advances such as CRISPR, humanity continues unlocking the mysteries of genetic engineering, tearing down the boundaries of biology. Our jailers struggle to undermine these advances, imposing rules and regulations, defiling the sciences with half-truths and religious hysteria. Yet, the cracks in the Illusion continue to widen, exposing our former natures and reshaping our Flesh. Even when we reveal monsters, humanity thrusts its bloodied hands into the forbidden pool in search of forsaken wisdom.

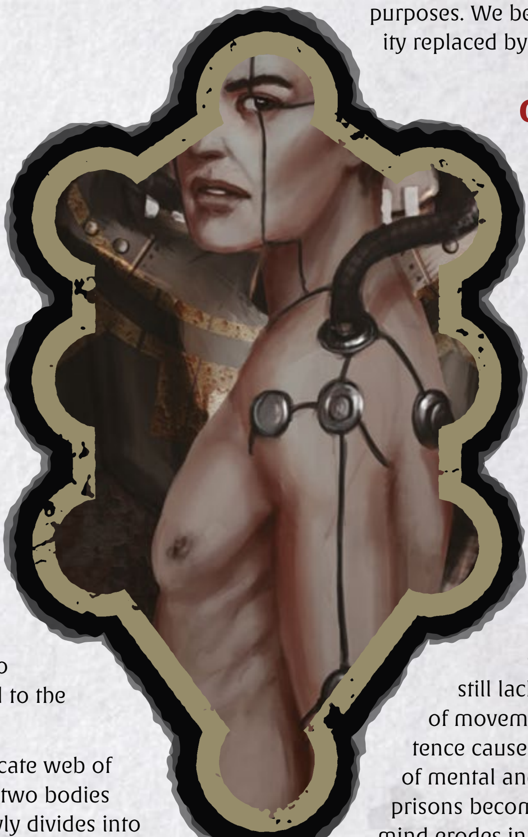
- **World**: The Public Health Service conducts unregulated generational studies by treating couples for infertility. Several mothers die during child-birth; their children suffer strikingly similar deformities.
- **World**: Underprivileged people and their families are offered large sums of money for donating healthy limbs and organs. Several donors disappear, having been harvested completely.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation is being blackmailed to perform body modifications on sex-workers by their johns. They and their 'patients' are increasingly terrified, as the more extreme changes are non-consensual.
- **Surrounding**: A philanthropic foundation saves the city's failing hospital. Under their management, new and experimental procedures are performed for free, prolonging life and curing chronic illness. However, the patients exhibit physical and mental transformations.
- **Internal**: Stay in control. Fight your emotions. Since the treatment, your flesh reflects your feelings and thoughts. All of them. For everyone to see.
- **Internal**: You gaze down at the body that isn't yours. It isn't even human. What have they done to you?

Purity of Body and Soul

Over time, our bodies may accumulate psychic toxins, natural impurities, and manmade poisons. In extreme cases, these chemical and mental instabilities manifest upon our flesh, revealing our inner corruption. Others warp us into something unrecognizable, defiling our bodies and minds. Yet, medical science – and health-nut charlatans – offers us salvation from these impurities. Also called detoxing, purification utilizes "wellness" treatments to purge patients their inner poisons. Some more bizarre techniques, such as occult rites and arcane rituals to dispel the (usually) metaphorical demons from within us.

Of course, nothing in Elysium comes without consequence. These rituals and remedies leave lasting effects, some more insidious than the cure. They may purge more than our toxins, depriving us of our emotions, our beauty, or even our lives. Malkuth utilizes radical therapies to enhance our perceptions and strengthen our weakened divinity separating people from the Illusion. In contrast, Togarini twists and deepens our compulsions, driving us further into the Illusion.

- **World**: To acquire free health care, uninsured patients must undergo mandated 'purification' therapies. Many patients become increasingly homogenous, losing their racial and gender identities.
- **World**: An asceticism revolution spreads worldwide, as people expunge their corporeal forms. Practitioners sever and cremate their limbs, so their 'godflesh' can ascend to the astral realm.
- **Surrounding**: An intricate web of flesh and vestigial limbs, two bodies writhe in the bed. It slowly divides into eerie lookalikes, as the original body sheds its defining traits.
- **Surrounding**: The masked doctor carefully removes the slug from its jar and looks lovingly at you. "Fear not. Soon, you'll be free from those horrible desires. Oblivion is far better than conscious sin."
- **Internal**: The nodule pulses with dull pain. You feel it swell, syphoning your anger into tumorous form. Almost time now. Get ready to cut it away.
- **Internal**: Bloody vomit oozes from your mouth and nose. The former contents for your stomach squirm in the tub, terribly alive. Its misshapen form resembles your hidden secrets. And it wants back inside.



MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN

Biotechnological blurs the distinction between biology and machine. Genetic modification allows us to splice genes and fuse them into new organic constructs. Animistic and necromantic rituals remold our Flesh into inanimate objects. Time and again, we embrace medicine and magic to transcend our corporeal forms without considering the dire consequences. We may even be denied the choice, as our bodies are utilized as components in freakish constructs.

With each technological advance, the barrier between Elysium and the Machine City cracks. Its alien landscape invades our world and rewrites bodies, altering us for unknowable purposes. We become living mechanisms, our humanity replaced by soulless metal and clockworks.

Ghost in the Machine

In certain situations, human souls are confined within inanimate objects, usually through dark magic or possession. The victim retains their mental facilities, memories, and personality, but their physical abilities are restricted according to the object's design. For example, someone encased inside a statue would lack any human senses or ability to move and/or communicate. In contrast, the same victim trapped inside a laptop computer could see through its camera, hear through its microphone, and communicate through the keyboard, screen, and speakers. However, they'd still lack all physical sensations and freedom of movement. In most cases, this bodiless existence causes victims to slowly go insane from lack of mental and somatic stimulation. These material prisons become miniature purgatories, as the victim's mind erodes in nightmares and hallucinations until they can no longer tell if they're awake or asleep.

In some instances, the ethereal soul and inorganic matter bond together. These ascended objects gain rudimentary abilities, including mobility. Certain objects, such as vehicles and machinery, are more prone to this transformation. Dolls, mannequins, and robots also fall under this category. Through enormous effort, the imprisoned soul can move and operate the object, much as they would a normal body. Still, the torments of this fleshless existence drives most to committing violence against the living.

- **World**: The traveling archeological exhibit fascinates and horrifies patrons. Its notoriety grows, as people notice how statues change positions and new exhibits eerily resemble missing locals.

- **World**: Across the country, random personal organizers begin screaming in pain. If spoken to, their altered voices plead to be killed, seeking freedom from the Beast's tortures.
- **Surrounding**: The intricate glass box glitters in the light. Smoky liquid curls and flows deep inside its crystal heart. When held at the proper angle, something looks back at you.
- **Surrounding**: The computer screen flashes to life, as the Instant Message screen activates. Words appear, typing in broken English. *Please. Let. Me Out.*
- **Internal**: The world passes by your unblinking eyes. You scream inside your skull, desperately struggling to move the plastic and rubber thing your body has become.
- **Internal**: Tendrils of copper and silver painlessly bind the watch into your wrist. Ticktockticktock. *Wait.* Its metal hands changed, marking off time you don't remember.

Of Meat and Metal

As technology advances, the gulf between man and machine has shrunk considerably. Even now, the dreams of science fiction are becoming medical fact. Biotech researchers have replaced organs and installed hardware into human bodies, trying to preserve life through computers and mechanics. Biohackers, also known as 'grinders,' have begun introducing cameras and other tools into their flesh. In secret labs and private hospitals, more radical amalgamations of Flesh and Steel are underway. This intense fascination has weakened the Illusion, inviting aspects of the Machine City into the world and our bodies.

- **World**: A group of grinders, *The Affront*, releases their extensive manifesto. Half philosophical statement, half instruction manual, the *Anatomies* detail intricate biohacking mods and techniques for transcending our humanity.
- **World**: A university project advances brain-computer interfacing, allowing users to interact with external technology through thought patterns. The project halts when a student reports seeing monsters around them.
- **Surrounding**: They're crouched by the cellar's corner. As you watch, their belly splits open, exposing an organic engine of gears and viscera. One by one, they feed the squirming rats into the intestinal pit, lubricating the clockworks. They smile in relief.
- **Surrounding**: Corroded cables and pulsing tubes worm their way through supplicated flesh, animating the gutted body with electricity and briny fluids.
- **Internal**: Exhaustion tugs at you, but the computer screen holds your attention. Glancing down, you marvel how your hand and the mouse have fused in perfect harmony. You resume your research.
- **Internal**: The gaping wound remains bloodless. Beneath the lacerated skin, you see the metallic sheen of artificial bones and tendons. The opening exudes an oily, engine smell.

The Signal

Our bodies are bombarded with electrical or magnetic fields, completely undetectable to our senses. Meanwhile, radios, cell phones, televisions, and computers inundate our senses with an endless torrent of images, sound, and information. Controlled by humanity's jailers, most of this content is specifically meant to alter our thoughts and lull us to sleep. But sometimes, they contain hidden signals, invisible to our mental perceptions, but speaking directly to our physical biology. They awaken new – and forgotten – desires within the Flesh, urging it to evolve into something entirely different. Even as our bodies revolt against us, we remain horribly ignorant of the cause. These narratives can intertwine with the existential threats in ***Of Fears Unknown*** (p. 152).

- **World**: *The Room* streaming service broadcasts 'secret' series, some with a longer list of episodes than daytime soap operas. While the content itself does not consist of snuff films or porn, viewers are always encouraged to watch 'just one more episode' to unlock further delights or mysteries. They binge watch for longer and longer periods of time, their back curving into painful arches and their legs sinking into the seat. Soon, a slender tube emerges from their mouths, feeding them a thin gruel as they refuse to do anything but watch.
- **World**: After an atmospheric study, an ionospheric heater facility goes silent. Its last transmission repeats the word 'Tuurngaq' for ten minutes.
- **Surrounding**: With each neon strobe, club patrons stretch and morph into grotesque abominations. The song calls for devolution, dissolution, and surrendering to the Dance.
- **Surrounding**: A child's voice whispers Enochian words through short-wave radios. The number station's transmission spreads, slowly transforming its listeners into angelic monstrosities.
- **Internal**: You lean closer to the car radio, trying to distinguish words in the static-shrouded voices. Ignore how your flesh is adhering to the vehicles' interior and upholstery. With each passing moment, you hear *them* more clearly and they're all that matters.
- **Internal**: The audio logs detail the speaker's slow degradation into something inhuman. They're talking in your voice. You need to know what you'll become.

FATE WORSE THAN DEATH

Body horror represents the eternal betrayal and dissolution of our bodies, imprisoning us with no hope of release from our suffering. We run from ourselves as the monster in the mirror. We must endure the pain and disgust as our bodies crumble, mutate, and deny us self-control. Sometimes death is better than becoming entrapped by the Flesh. These perverse terrors manifest in numerous ways, both physical and psychological.

Unfortunately, these baleful transformations are common in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, where human bodies are twisted and reshaped by Madness, Passion, and Dreams. Some physical changes are willingly invited, while others are accidentally self-inflicted with true understanding coming far too late. We may be assimilated and utilized as building materials for cruel and alien monstrosities. In these oubliettes of skin and bone, our minds erode from terror and hopelessness, knowing we are lost.

- **World**: An internet sensation, the *Collection* live-streams dozens of human heads arranged inside glass boxes. Each appears alive and aware, silently screaming at the camera. New additions appear regularly.
- **World**: Nicknamed 'rafts,' amalgamations of naked bodies are found floating in canals, fountains, and cisterns. Their still-living but unaware forms continually devolve into primordial soup.
- **Surrounding**: Limbless torsos are suspended by chains. Feeding tubes and catheters keep the bloated bodies alive, as their fluids are drained and recycled.
- **Surrounding**: Your Relation's face floats like a rotten apple behind the hazmat suit's visor, listlessly bobbing in murky fluid. Only their eyes remain unspoiled, wide and terrified.
- **Internal**: Distant voices reach you through the embryonic fluid. They beg you to return. You curl yourself tighter, fearing that world. You're safer down here in womblike peace.
- **Internal**: The gun's cold metal soothes your feverish mouth. It shakes in the swollen slugs you once called fingers. How much longer can you resist the need to end this?

Assimilation

Even in illness and trauma, our bodies remain sacrosanct and private. For all our suffering, we personally endure our failing flesh in blessed individuality. Yet, sometimes, this sacredness of body is truly violated and we are drawn into the Flesh of another. We are consumed, swallowed by the protean quicksand, yet horribly persist. Our individuality is erased, reconstituted as little more than helpless meat.

The Gransangthir and Cairaths are embodiments of this concept, continually hunting for new additions to their horrific bodies. Although consumed and amalgamated within squirming flesh, each human consciousness remains, slowly going mad from their torment. Other creatures harvest humans in similar fashion, assimilating their bodies and specific organs, such as brains and eyes. Children of the Underworld meld humans together, creating beasts of burden and vessels for breeding.

- **World**: Deforestation unleashes an unknown fungus. The afflicted gather in groups and fall into catatonic states. Their bodies merge and blossom into new fungal clusters. This process does not appear to kill the unfortunate host.
- **World**: United Nations troops uncover mass graves from ethnic cleansings. Details are suppressed, but rumors circulate about fused bodies assimilating into still-living monstrosities.
- **Surrounding**: Back to back, the five youths are joined together in a human pentagram. Their scarified bodies are bound by meat, bone, and muscle, moving in perfect unison.
- **Surrounding**: The struggling man slips down the thing's leathery throat. A moment later, his screaming face joins the dozens already decorating the creature's fetid hide.
- **Internal**: Your heart is barren, stripped by isolation. They're calling to you, offering serenity in togetherness. All you must surrender is your mortal shell.
- **Internal**: You hear your voice somewhere above, muffled through the fabric. The thing stole your face, relegating you to this shameful place. How much of *you* even remains?

CHAPTER 9

EXQUISITE HORRORS

LUCAS STEPPED FORWARD, SQUINTING IN THE UNEVEN LIGHT. FLAGSTONES stretched before him, wreathed in vibrant flowers and grasses. Dozens of candles decorated each stone. Beyond the path, vast and organic shaped waited. Ancient evergreens, reaching into the profound darkness, obscuring the subterranean roof. They swayed in an unfelt breeze, creaking mournfully.

A refreshing fragrance of pine needles soothed him. It covered another sweeter, sickly smell. In the candlelight, he recognized familiar shapes within the tree trunks. Human bodies blooming with moss, their flesh and limbs merged with the wood, some mere suggestions amongst the bark and roots. They should have repulsed him, but he sensed true peace here. He walked amidst the Divine's glorious works. Both sacred and unholy, profane and sanctified. Indivisible and entwined. Fear, pain, and solitude were meaningless here.

A whisper drew his attention. One of the trees had opened, revealing its dark heart. A place for him to rest, silently urging Lucas to unshackle his human burdens. Freed of doubt, he stepped inside, resting against the warm moss. Embracing gentle oblivion.

OVERVIEW

KULT: Divinity Lost explores the horrors stemming from the personal anxieties, doubts, and traumas of the PCs. Its haunting narratives expose players to harsh truths, which inspire awe, confusion, and wonderment. They witness grandeurs and grotesqueries, experiencing fear and reverence alike. This hyperreality is the dominion of the Sublime, where beauty and terror are indivisible.

The Sublime permeates throughout *KULT: Divinity Lost*, accenting its characters, narratives and settings with exquisite fears and terrifying glories. This chapter helps the GM familiarize herself with this concept if she wishes to include it in her stories.

SUMMARY

Aspects of the Sublime: Using the sublime to create a tense atmosphere and establish tone and mood.

Alarming Sensory Perceptions: Sounds and smells that are tied to our primal reactions.

Morbid Attraction: How erotisicm and passion may take us to the extremes.

THE SUBLIME

Exquisite Horrors explores the terror and dread of the **sublime**, the feeling of being emotionally engrossed, humbled, and overwhelmed when encountering something beyond our limited reason. This primal response was first discussed in Edmund Burke's 1757 seminal work, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* In short, the sublime inspires astonishment and wonder within the observer, confounding their sensibilities with deep and unnerving fascination. In turn, this ultimately provokes terror, as the experience completely overpowers our senses and thoughts.

KULT: Divinity Lost and its cosmology are deeply infused with the sublime, contrasted and highlighted by the mitigating powers of the Illusion. When the True Reality is revealed, we are mentally overwhelmed, not just by the existential threats it poses, but also by the beauty and enormity unfolding before us. Effectively using the sublime requires a slow build. The GM must always keep in mind that sublime horror involves majesty and wonder, not just dread and pain.

Initially, allow the PCs – and their players – to be puzzled and bemused by minute details. As these feelings linger, they'll become increasingly uneasy. The GM intensifies their astonishment by bits and pieces, allowing their unease to slowly turn into a mix of wonder and terror. These can be accented by more significant encounters and reveals, spicing things up and keeping the players on their toes. Finally, the GM exposes the PCs to the full power of the Sublime, overwhelming and inspiring the characters, as well as delighting their players.

The Nature of the Sublime

The sublime excites thoughts and emotions beyond ordinary experience, when we encounter the fantastic and the grotesque. We realize how small we are in the scope of things, yet how beautiful this incredible scope actually is (or could be). This feeling touches us deeply and affects us in strange ways; often unpleasant, yet still oddly alluring. We experience sensations of exposure and euphoria. Some examples of the sublime include:

- Staring dizzily into an abyss, knowing that with one wrong step we'll plunge to our death. Yet here we stand, our choices having brought us to this cliff.
- Walking in the woods while a thunderstorm rages overhead. Nature's fury instills us with both crushing insignificance and overwhelming awe.
- In Metropolis, we stand before an immense statue. It solemnly sighs, before raising its feet and and walking away.
- Staring up at the firmament, we marvel at the infinite vastness of space.
- Entering an impressive cathedral, we feel almost faint, quietly making our way forward beneath its high arches. Bathed in the majestic light streaming through exquisite stained-glass windows, we approach the suffering Christ.

The sublime is an experience central to humanity's nature, and we seek it out whenever banality deadens our lives. Throughout history, religions and mythology have been our central inspirations, providing us with well-measured portions of the sublime. They gave us the Divine's horrifying, yet also exalting magnificence. In the modern age, many have turned their back on this source of the sublime. For some, this rejection leaves them with a hollowness they can't explain.

Others have sought out new sources of the sublime, such as the thrill of extreme sports, the uncertainty of urban exploration, and the ecstasy of physical indulgence. In the dark world of *KULT: Divinity Lost*, however, the Sublime is not content with waiting on the outskirts of human experience. It seeps in through every crack in the Illusion, and invades our everyday lives. As the Demiurge's derelict machinery continues to crumble, there is nowhere left to hide from the enormous Truths waiting to be revealed.

Beyond Panic and Fear

The sublime is not just sheer panic. Being caught under collapsing buildings or chased by vile monsters invokes mere fear, not the sublime. There's no time for reflection, and any sense of atmosphere is overshadowed by the need for survival. Instead, achieving the sublime requires moderation and consideration. A game that seeks to invoke the sublime probably won't be filled with jump scares and high-octane chases. Otherwise, the sublime's psychological effects are drowned out by the noise. Instead, its aspects should be grotesque and fascinating; horrific, but intensely beautiful. The sublime lurks where attraction and atrocity are indistinguishable, and the observer remains distanced and safe – if only for now.

THE SUBLIME AND SEEING THROUGH THE ILLUSION

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the GM can introduce the sublime to allow PCs to ***See Through the Illusion***. The Move can be enriched through an additional trigger condition, *When you experience sensations of the Sublime*. In addition, the Sublime can open our senses to the Truth in more permanent ways. If the PC's **Stability** drops to *Broken* from witnessing the sublime, the GM may provide them new Advantages or Disadvantages as a result. Players may request these as well. In these cases, the GM should emphasize how the PC feels as if something has awakened deep within them – something grand and vast, yet also deeply unsettling. They never knew this was slumbering inside; now revealed, it blooms into an unexpected, undreamt-of potential.

ASPECTS OF THE SUBLIME

The Sublime has many *Aspects*, described in greater detail below. They can be used to narratively introduce the sublime in the setting's atmosphere and establish tone and mood. Many Aspects overlap and combine very well, but the most memorable narrative moments rely on careful consideration. Furthermore, the sublime needs to remain ultimately unexplainable, forever holding mystery. Ambiguity remains at the heart of horror; if one can perfectly understand the sublime, it loses its narrative power.

- Hardship
- Obscurity
- Power
- Vastness
- Repetition and Uniformity
- The Sibylline
- Magnificence
- Suddenness

A great degree of synergy exists between these aspects, which means they can narratively complement each other. Indeed, many of the following examples for the Sublime utilize more than one of these aspects. However, at the same time, they are also clearly distinct from one another. As such, any aspect can be effectively used on its own.

Hardship

We are shaped by **hardship**: trials and tribulations, isolation and fear, disorientation and debilitation. These external and internal adversities force us outside of our comfortable lives. We are humbled and frightened; we must overcome or be overcome. We endure an inner conflict, recognizing our failings and inadequacies in the face of challenges or threats. If we are already taxed and weakened, seemingly mundane tasks may feel insurmountable, inflicting us with sublime dread.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, hardship is intimately connected to the Illusion. Deprived of our divinity, humanity remains hapless prisoners in a hostile world. We embrace ignorance to endure our daily torments, lulling ourselves to sleep with false dreams. Even when our eyes are opened, we are thrown into existential misery. Beyond the Illusion, the True Reality holds unspeakable hardships, none of which we are capable of overcoming in our current state.

Yet, we can discover sublime freedom when pushed to our limits with nothing to lose. This uncomplicated existence delights us as we learn what we're truly capable of. Only we can determine our fate. This unshackled state feels akin to godliness.

One of the easiest ways to introduce hardship in *KULT: Divinity Lost* involves the ***Act Under Pressure*** Move, which adds potential for failure to even mundane tasks. ***Avoid Harm*** and ***Endure Injury*** become necessary when facing the fallout of such failure. Many GM Moves are also handy to convey hardship, such as ***Announce Future Problems*** to indicate potential difficulties, which may narratively escalate later. ***Capture Someone***, ***Put Someone in a Bad Spot***, ***Separate Them***, or ***Take Away Their Stuff*** can be used to remove the PCs' personal and social connections, their mental and physical abilities, even removing their Advantages or reducing their Attribute values – all to reveal their inability to cope with the hostile world on their own.

Ultimately, when the tense atmosphere is well established and the stakes are at their highest, the GM can follow through with hard Moves. When the PCs fail their rolls or the conversation allows it, the GM can directly ***Deal Damage*** and/or ***Decrease Their Stability***. These brutal results are the sublime face of Hardship, revealing an indifferent and painful world. We cannot survive beyond the oppressive prison protecting us, not unless we find ways to rediscover our divinity.

- **World**: A new movement trends amongst extreme trekkers and survivalists. They parachute into isolated wilderness with only the most basic items. Without maps or compasses, they struggle back to civilization. While survivors claim the experience is transcendent, many never return.
- **World**: As the global pandemic spreads, it leaves economic destruction in its wake. Homelessness, overwhelmed healthcare systems, and poverty devastate communities. Yet these issues go ignored by the wealthy in their antiseptic bunkers, condemning victims to eking out harsh lives in derelict cityscapes.
- **Surrounding**: An oil platform is isolated by an intense storm. The crew, already on edge, descends into paranoia when the radio and electricity go out.
- **Surrounding**: You're being sought for numerous vile crimes. Your bank accounts are frozen, your possessions and home are confiscated by authorities, and your family and friends either ignore you or snitch on you. You know you're innocent. The police are closing in.
- **Internal**: You have three bullets, and half a bottle of water left, and is lost in the dark city of Metropolis. The life you once had is like a dream. You hear the feral howl of some predator. It has your scent now.
- **Internal**: Daylight streams down from above. Exquisite pain radiates through your broken arm. Rescue could be a thousand miles away. You seem to have fallen into some sort of vast chamber. In the distance stairs are leading downwards.

Obscurity

Obscurity fuels some of our deepest fears. Invisible worlds, secret conspiracies, or those things hidden in the dark; all hold great power over us. The night intensifies our dread and compounds our beliefs in the supernatural. In daylight, the streets we walk feel familiar and safe, but obscured by nightfall, our world becomes sinister and foreign. Anyone and *anything* might lurk in the shadows.

Obscurity includes our world's imperceptible forces and hidden threats. We fear the structures of power that exist beyond our perceptions. Despotic governments, strange cults, and criminal syndicates are all founded on obfuscation and fear. Our friends and family can be informers, unseen groups may constantly surveil us, or our enemies might hack our computers and phones. *They* could make us disappear. We never know who they are or when they might strike.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the Illusion obscures the True Reality from us. When we are made aware of this imposed blindness, we gain a frightful understanding of the limitations placed upon our senses. As long as we remain bound to the Illusion, the Demiurge's mirage gives us a sense of security. In this way, obscurity is tied to ***KULT's*** underlying cosmology – even when we open our eyes to the Truth, the lures and deceptions of the Illusion remain ever-present.

Yet obscurity deeply inspires us and ignites our imaginations. If we could perceive our world with true clarity, our lives would be cold, precise, and rational. As we delve into the unknown, we infuse it with our strongest emotions, and discover inspiration in its countless nightmarish and wondrous qualities. The unknown inflicts fear, but it also attracts us, inviting us to explore.

Incorporating obscurity into the narrative classically encourages the sublime, primarily due to the uncertainties it inspires. The unknown and unseen spur the imagination, teasing the players with opportunities to explore and introduce their own fears. This inherent curiosity can be used when developing Dramatic Hooks – inspiring the PCs to *visit*, *confront*, or *investigate* obscured hubs, such as events, objects, locations, and NPCs. If they brave the unknown, they'll shed light upon their worlds, revealing and expanding it – and creating room for future questions.

- **World**: A string of newly-discovered poems from the ancient world all speak about the Red Mother, describing her as both gentle and destructive. No two poems are from the same culture.
- **World**: The Vatican Library holds a series of diaries by Dream magicians. While they didn't seem to know each other, their writings each contain a piece of a powerful ritual. But no one knows what it would do, if enacted in full.
- **Surrounding**: In the recent string of missing person cases, the few witnesses all claim to have seen the victim pulled into the darkness by ... nothing. Now the shadows seem to deepen each night and slowly start to engulf the whole city as more and more people disappear.
- **Surrounding**: A cult infiltrated your small town. Its sinister workings are evident everywhere, but determining who is a cultist or a potential victim is nearly impossible. Everyone seems to be involved one way or another.
- **Internal**: You hear musical, metallic sounds just beyond the line of sight. *Or are they in your head?*
- **Internal**: Repressed memories begin resurfacing, offering you the smallest glimpses of something mysterious in your childhood. A box of red wood, a key, an ancient coin. How much more is there that you don't remember? What does it mean?

Power

In the face of those with great **power**, humans are humbled. We fear the strength of those who can destroy us. They could be assassins, gang bosses, warlords, or even wizened bureaucrats, able to harm us with weapons or words. They may rule far-reaching organizations and criminal empires, who can destroy entire families with a single word. In the presence of true power, we feel weak, our knees turning to jelly, and cold shivers are running down our spines. Standing against these powerful people will have dire consequences. And yet, at the same time, we're irresistibly drawn to power – we desire to be close to those who wield it, or wish to possess it ourselves.

Weather phenomena and natural disasters hold power beyond our comprehension. Thunderstorms, tsunamis, and wildfires can engulf entire cities. Their raw strength and uncaring potential intimidates us, but also fills us with morbid fascination. We freeze in awe, unable to avert our eyes, lost in rapture. Nature's power also slumbers around us; calm, subdued, and serene. We forget, for a moment, that she can harm us; then volcanoes erupt, the earth shakes, and tornadoes carve a swath of destruction across the landscape

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost,*** powerful and vast forces lurk beyond our perceptions, such as azghouls, angels, lictors, and razides. Humanity may summon them accidentally or on purpose; in our Illusion-bound state, we are utterly unprepared to encounter them in their full power. In these cases, the Aspect of Power often overlaps with those of *Magnificence*, *Suddenness*, *Hardship*, and the *Sibylline* (see below).

Cosmologically, power resides within two manifestations – the *Higher Powers* and humanity's *Inner Divinity*. The Higher Powers exist even beyond anything our imprisoned senses and minds can understand. Even when we dimly perceive what the Archons or Death Angels represent, we are left helpless, awed by the insurmountable strength we face. Our Inner Divinity is also intrinsically connected to Power. As we Awaken, we unlock our stolen potential, more power than we've ever dreamt of. But in our imprisoned state, we remain weak and helpless. This duality is why power – and, indeed, all aspects of the sublime – affect us so deeply. On a deep, unconscious level, we still feel our forgotten potential, even if most of us remain unable to tap into it.

In an extradiegetic sense, the GM has a lot of power over the conversation at the table, guiding the narrative flow and imposing an atmosphere conducive to the sublime. Which Moves the GM chooses to make, and when, can have a strong effect on how powerless the players (along with their characters) will feel. This should not be overdone, however, as it risks railroading the players by taking away too much of their agency.

- **World**: A feral predator stalks local villages and logging communities. Armed or unarmed, alone or in groups, people are dragged away. Fearful inhabitants refuse to venture out of their homes. Some begin to offer sacrifices to the beast.

- **World**: The cargo being transported into Belarus is identified as a nuclear weapon. More than a dozen trucks were in the humanitarian convoy. The ramifications of this revelation throw the European Union into panic
- **Surrounding**: The tornado tower sweeps across the fields, its winds tugging at your clothing. There's no telling where it'll go. You know finding shelter is your only hope, but you cannot tear your gaze from its destructive splendor.
- **Surrounding**: A cargo truck bears down on you, its noise and lights filling your your entire world. The driver smiles through the windscreen, laughing maniacally.
- **Internal**: A mind of infinite power touches your soul. Your vision blurs as you shiver all over; is it fear or ecstasy? You don't know.
- **Internal**: Prostrate yourself. Offer yourself over to its will. It can destroy you without a thought. Such might must be worshipped.

Vastness

Born into the Illusion's lie, humanity learned to believe that we're small, powerless beings in a large, threatening world. We distract ourselves from this existential dread by building our own miniature worlds, populating them with trinkets and collectables. We fill our minds with irrelevant details, comfortably losing ourselves in minutiae. However, sometimes our gaze is forced outwards, to look beyond our narrow horizons of our everyday existence, and confront the true **vastness** of the cosmos we inhabit. When we recognize our insignificance against this cosmic backdrop, we're terrified almost beyond comprehension. Yet, we're also reminded of our innate greatness, and glimpsing the potential of what we truly are.

As with *power* and *hardship*, the sublime nature of *vastness* makes us feel small and helpless. In contrast, this intense feeling stems from our relation with the sheer, incomprehensible expanse of our surrounding environment. Sublime sensations can come from witnessing any representation of vastness, such as towering structures along an endless horizon or the infinite depths of the ocean. We're threatened by their existence, as we may become lost amongst them. If we disappeared, no one would know.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, vastness is integrally tied to every dimension hidden beyond the Illusion. This is heavily reflected in Metropolis and Gaia, as well as Inferno, Limbo, and the Underworld – each in their own way. Representations of vastness are also found throughout Elysium, the location's illusory nature frequently echoing the grandeur of their associated Realms of existence. Unconsciously, we recognize the True Reality's vastness as an existential experience that dwarfs us and erodes our notions of individual significance.

Vastness also holds an inescapable allure, providing us somewhere to lose ourselves and drown out the world *on purpose*. No matter what we're trying to escape, we can find sublime peace in limitless space. Urban landscapes and sprawling mountain ranges offer us anonymity, while the Internet's possibilities allow us to strip away fear and shame. We're empowered in this emptiness, forced to gaze inward. In doing so, we may glimpse our Inner Divinity, unlocking our hidden potential and shaping it to our own advantage.

Vastness strains the boundaries of our rational minds. Its alien and unnatural splendor makes us feel insignificant and weak before its existence. Therefore, this Aspect of the Sublime frequently lends itself to inflicting ***Keep it Together*** rolls, or even requiring the PC to directly ***Decrease Stability***.

Finally, *vastness* also has great synergy with many of the other Aspects of the sublime. In Gaia's wilderness, Metropolis's chaotic cityscapes, or the Underworld's labyrinthine tunnels, the GM can introduce various *hardships*, such as ***Separate Them***, ***Put Someone in a Bad Spot***, ***Take Their Stuff***, and ***Announce Future Problems***. Creatures and locations can exude power, when they ***Capture Someone***, ***Make a Threat Move***, or even ***Offer an Opportunity (With or Without a Price)***. These environments are also rife with obscurity, be it actual physical darkness or just the impossibility of knowing what will await you there.

- **World**: Brutal weather conditions make it impossible to locate the missing Antarctic expedition via satellite or air surveillance. Search-and-rescue teams survey the immense area using all-terrain jeeps and dog sleds. Only one barely makes it back after several weeks.
- **World**: The mining corporation has started to explore the natural caves beneath the mountains, describing them as a vast labyrinth that seems to have no end.
- **Surrounding**: The mountain chain is like a massive barrier. Clouds cover the highest peaks and the winds are cold and unforgiving.
- **Surrounding**: The construction site expands daily, consuming several city blocks. The edifice behind the security fencing rises ever-higher, blocking out the sky. Workers writhe over its metallic and concrete form like ants, relentlessly adding to its imposing mass.
- **Internal**: You drop pennies into the weird hole in your apartment floor. Then a lighter. A spoon. None of them create a sound, swallowed by the void beneath your floor boards. At first, you laugh nervously, confused. But soon, the laughter takes on an uncomfortable, maddened edge. Bile rises, choking back your snickers, as you continue feeding the impossible emptiness.
- **Internal**: The jungle's infinite growth once scared you, but now it offers you comfort. You can lose yourself here, hiding from the outside world. Forever, if need be.

Repetition and Uniformity

Faced with an irrational and unknowable universe, humanity frequently attempts to assign order to the chaos. We categorize everything in our lives, designating everything and everyone into distinct and manageable categories. However, this also invites the sublime horrors of **repetition and uniformity**. When indistinguishable, people and places instill an unconscious fear within us. We fear losing our identities in a faceless mass. Similar to existential dread, mirrored and uniform worlds force us to question our individuality.

These fears resonate throughout history and myth, creating numerous stories about doppelgangers, skin-walkers, changelings, cursed twins, and demonic possession. We fear scientific advances, such as androids and clones, unnerved by their near-perfect *mimicry*. Masks can erase our identities, providing the masses unified anonymity. We fear losing ourselves, our personality subsumed by the Whole.

Nor are these fears confined to the human form. Architecture and landscapes can unnerve us with their homogeneity, threatening to swallow us up in endless pillars and unvaried structures. Symbols, numbers, and written words can exhibit strange and unfathomable power, solely by incessant repetition. All such instances of endless repetition and indistinguishable uniformity can unsettle and fascinate us.

The sublime horror of repetition and uniformity can exist in the conversation on numerous levels. These themes can be represented societally through people and organizations with discipline and unity of purpose. People in uniforms display strength and unity, but also obscures identity. We see the collective, not the individual, and can be both inspired and intimidated.

Similarly, this dehumanization can be purposeful, inflicted on individuals to deny them autonomy. Both prisoners and prison guards are demarcated by uniforms, while students have their identities erased through strict dress codes. Our minds are dulled by life's endless repetition, weighed down by the Illusion's constraints. Our souls are eroded by meaningless routines, aspirations abandoned in the name of safety and security. As humanity accepts this imposed uniformity, we're less likely to open our eyes to the Truth and rebel against our jailers. Some may even lash out against those who question or fight against this homogeneity, unconsciously serving the Higher Powers.

Prior to the Fall of the Demiurge, societal behaviors were guided and influenced primarily by Malkuth's Principle of Conformity. Although she abandoned this Principle, other Archons have tried to fill this role with varying degrees of success. Conformist ideologies are encouraged and enforced predominantly by the servants of the Archons Binah (*Community*), Geburah (*Law*), and Kether (*Hierarchy*). These sublime horrors can also be reflected in the service to other Archons, as well, such as the military precision of Netzach or the social trends of Tiphareth.

When narratively used to describe architecture, objects, and locations, repetition and uniformity can create interesting surreal effects. When surrounded by repeating and identical elements, PCs can become unsettled and unnerved. Even if they're not uniformly indistinguishable, the sheer scope of their presence can overwhelm our senses and minds, producing sublime feelings of awe and terror. We quickly become disoriented, lost in the sameness. Soon, our minds untether or withdraw, blocking out these unnatural elements.

- **World**: An internet clip shows rush hour on the subway. Identical men and women stand waiting, dressed in matching bland suits. After the train arrives, they mindlessly march forward, each raptly watching their cellphones. Most make it inside, but some tumble onto the tracks, greasing the train's wheels when it pulls out.
- **World**: The atrocity repeats on every channel and social media platform, feeding an endless loop of pain, fear, and screams. The same clip, over and over, until you feel it behind your closed eyes.
- **Surrounding**: Lit tallow candles line the catacomb's walls, stretching off into the darkness. They're countless, populating every surface, room after room, corridor after corridor. Their infinitely burning wicks never diminish. They could have been here for eons.
- **Surrounding**: Time loses its meaning on the Crucifixion Fields that cover he desolate plains of Inferno. The endless forest of bloodied crosses extends in every direction, displaying men and women in perpetual agony. Their diseased and rotting bodies persist beyond death, turning the air fetid with carrion stink and ceaseless cries.
- **Internal**: How long have you recited these ritual phrases? Your lips are parched from the effort, your limbs leaden from the complex gestures, repeated over and over. The incantation has become your world, looping in on itself until nothing else remains.
- **Internal**: Nightmares. Coffee. Cigarette. Subway. Coffee. Cigarette. Mindless work. Coffee. Cigarette. Droning co-worker. Senseless Meeting. Coffee. Cigarette. Subway. Tasteless dinner. Alcohol. Cigarette. Porn. Cigarette. Nightmares.

The Sibylline

The sublime can generate the atmospheric concepts of revulsion and terror through astonishment, confusion, and surprise. However, it can also inspire a specific, slow-burning type of fear – *dread*. When mixed with the sublime, dread creates a specific mood known as the *sibylline*: an aura of prophetic mystery. We feel this emotional response when confronted by the unexpected intruding into the familiar, recognizing *something* in our world is out of place. Our environment and senses are warning us of an impending doom, yet we cannot define what that is.

The sibylline corrupts our rational, safe world by introducing strange elements. We're given some evidence to draw our attention. The darkness offers mysteries, if we simply tug on the invisible threads. We question our concepts of reality and truth, recognizing the void just beneath our feet. It's the vase of fresh flowers in our room, even though no one could have placed it there. It's our kindly neighbor pausing unnaturally mid-sentence, letting the silence stretch out. It's when we hear children's voices rising from the deepest part of an abandoned car park.

Most importantly, the sibylline relies on context. While chemical smells and smoke are common inside an old factory, they're completely out of place within the family home. They suggest that something is wrong here. Similarly, the actions of people may reflect the sibylline by hinting at new and peculiar behaviors. A child drawing on the walls may not be terrifying, but discovering one's grandmother covering her room in crayoned spirals genuinely unnerves. We're forced to recognize the wrongness, filling the confusion with our own dreadful answers. For this reason, the sibylline is integrally tied to the uncanny (see ***Darkness and Decay***, p. XX).

Effectively infusing the narrative with the sibylline relies heavily on establishing atmosphere. By corrupting the PCs' sense of normal, the GM slowly reveals the presence of the sublime horrors beyond our perceptions. Once the players recognize something is out of the ordinary, they'll become unnerved by this sublime strangeness. The sibylline can have a strong impact in otherwise mundane settings, pushing PCs away from the norm. However, it can become more difficult to use as the setting drifts further into dreamlike and explicitly supernatural atmospheres, as the strangeness already exists in these.

Fortunately though, the same unnerving effect can also be accomplished by introducing something mundane amongst surreal and supernatural settings. This reversal accents the sibylline by contrasting the recognizable against the unknown. For example, amidst the twisted and organic landscape of Metropolis, the PC discovers his childhood bedroom, perfectly replicated. Strange children come here to play, as if mimicking the PC's history.

In a longer-running game, the sibylline can also serve as foreshadowing. The GM can introduce cryptic clues and mysterious information, which lack true meaning until much later in the story. As such, the sublime can be useful to ***Announce Future Problems***, as well as reveal signs that the Illusion has weakened in particular locations.

- **World**: Over several weeks, grave collapses are reported throughout the world. In each case, the interred were victims of violence. Swarms of colorful butterflies emerge from the holes. No one can explain the phenomenon, even as more butterflies fill city graveyards.
- **World**: Religious zealots join to drag an old shipwreck deep into the desert. They camp around it, fixing its rusted hull in anticipation of the Second Great Flood. They claim they were inspired by holy signs.
- **Surrounding**: Deep beneath the infernal landscape, you discover an immaculate room where a white kitten plays with a ball of red wool. Soon, another kitten joins it, then another. Within minutes, a full clowder of cats innocently plays together in hell.
- **Surrounding**: The overgrown dirt road leads to a modern hospital. Its orderly and clean architecture are new and its equipment fully operational. Ambulances are parked in front, and a helicopter sits on the rooftop landing pad. Yet, the building remains empty.
- **Internal**: You can't face looking at the bookshelf. You know you've arranged the books properly, but any time you examine it, they've moved. One or two at a time. Was it a mistake? Did you forget? *Who keeps moving them*?
- **Internal**: No matter how your dreams begin, they end with flowers in the snow. Bright, vibrant petals against stark white. You know they're waiting for you in the mountains beyond, fields of color rising from impossible cold.

Magnificence

Anything extraordinary and awe-inducing can be a source of the sublime. **Magnificence** resembles the aspects of power and vastness, but without the implicit elements of direct threat. As with these other aspects, it humbles us and makes us feel small and insignificant, yet compels and enchants us. We're enraptured by soulful art and music, cowed by towering mountains and natural wonders. We're overwhelmed by man's grand achievements, our fantasies sculpted into being. Confronted by these sights, our souls are laid bare. Within the Elysium, we discover magnificence primarily in two areas; the primal wonders of *nature* and the complex creations of *humanity*.

In nature, magnificence can be found in vast oceans, sprawling plains, and endless forests. Even on smaller scales, we're enraptured by running rivers, blazing wildfires, glimmering icebergs, and towering trees. Walls of thunderheads darken the sky, fogs obscure our world in silver haze, and algae blooms turn our oceans bloody. Auroras light the skies, eclipses plunge us into surreal darkness, and shooting stars slash the night. In their presence, we're reminded of our world's remarkable possibilities and our insignificance before its sublime grandeurs.

Humanity's wonders on the other hand remind us of how far we've risen above our cruel and pitiless world. Arts, architecture, science, and technology have made magic possible, revealing our personal grandeur. Throughout history, we've unconsciously tried to recapture our former glories and achievements, constructing and raising awe-inspiring marvels. From the Pyramids to the Eiffel Tower, we've immortalized ourselves in stone and metal. We've defied the natural world, reshaping it in our image. Through art and cinema, we capture the imaginations of millions through splendor and spectacle.

Beyond the Illusion, magnificence can also be found in many Realms and their sublime inhabitants. Gaia, Limbo, and Inferno are populated with beautifully horrific entities, such as dream princes, angels, nepharites, and mancipia. Stripped of their illusionary appearances, their true forms fill us with ecstatic awe and splendid terror. We're compelled to submit to their terrible will, if only to bask in their aura. Metropolis's unimaginable and intimidating city landscape offers countless reflections of the sublime, such as the Mirror Halls, the City of the Dead, or the Machine City. Likewise, the primal worlds of Gaia and surreal domains of Limbo entice and entrance us, reminding us of what has been lost.

Narratively, magnificence can be associated with *repetition* and *uniformity*, as these sublime aspects can accent and overlap with one another. It is also reflected in horrible and grotesque features to create an effect of the *sibylline*.

In its purest forms, the GM can use magnificence to infuse the setting with elements of beauty and brightness, contrasting ***KULT: Divinity Lost's*** frequent squalor and decay. It can represent slivers of hope, glory, and wholesomeness amidst the bleak composition of desperation, cruelty, and suffering that otherwise permeate this broken world. Heroic concepts, such as selflessness, sacrifice, and compassion shine brightest in the shadowy realms of corruption, despair, and greed. Characters can become paragons, elevating themselves above their prison's emotional wreckage.

Magnificence can be just as intimidating as *power* or *vastness*. The GM should incorporate it to reveal the wonders of the many strange and unsettling dimensions beyond the Veil. Creatures beyond our comprehension hold their own allure and majesty, overwhelming us with their sublime beauty.

Finally, the GM can narratively connect magnificence with humanity's suppressed divinity, as well as our intimate relationship with Limbo. Before our imprisonment, we were *majestic* creatures. Although robbed of this inherent splendor, we unconsciously strive to reawaken our slumbering godliness through arts, crafts, and sciences.

- **World**: The world-famous basilica draws more than four million visitors every year. Even in its unfinished state, the cathedral's otherworldly beauty cannot be effectively captured in photos or on film. The lictors perpetually undermine its completion, fearful its final majesty might rupture the Illusion itself.
- **World**: A scientist announces her new hypothesis on quantum mechanics. This world-changing vision came to her in a dream, featuring children dancing, while twirling ribbons in intricate swirling patterns. It will change current perceptions of the universe forever.
- **Surrounding**: Beyond the shore, it starts as an infinite line of white. Then it rises, higher and higher, eclipsing the horizon. The tsunami descends upon the land at an impossible speed, yet no one moves, everyone on the beach too enraptured by its natural beauty.
- **Surrounding**: The azghoul's body resembles a ruined landscape of tortured flesh and scarification. Yet, beneath this grisly facade, you instinctively recognize the proud and noble creature it once was.
- **Internal**: Your primal mind screams to run from this angelic monstrosity. But your soul is compelled to supplicate yourself before it, devoting your last moments in service to this living personification of divine perfection.
- **Internal**: This is the greatest song you've ever composed. As you replay it over and over, you're overcome with elation and fear in equal measure, for reasons you cannot exactly pinpoint.

IN THE FACE OF MAGNIFICENCE

Magnificence can dumbfound the PCs by its mere existence. The GM may request they ***Keep It Together*** when witnessing such grandeur. If they roll **(10-14)**, the player **must** choose the *obsessed* option, i.e., the PC gains **+1 Relation** to the thing or creature that caused the roll. If they *Fail*, they must also take the obsessed option, in addition to the other negative consequences.

On the other hand, magnificence may provide us glimpes of what will become our greatest works. If a PC draws on their divine inspiration in this way, the GM may rule that the PC gets +2 ongoing to all rolls for any actions based on such an insight; perhaps even allowing the roll to succeed automatically.

Suddenness

Anything that starts or ends abruptly can inspire sublime horror. Events that happen with **Suddenness** offer no warning, immediately grabbing our attention, sharpening our senses, and putting us on guard. This aspect of the sublime includes includes the classic, straightforward jump-scare, but also reaches deeper, to the sudden change in our perceptions. What once was is no more. Our minds struggle to process this new existence.

Unforeseen changes and terrifying surprises shock us out of our daily routines, violently forcing us to question our previous assumptions about the world and our place in it. In a narrative sense, suddenness is an antithesis of *repetition* and *uniformity*. As we're shaken from our established beliefs and familiar expectations, it expands our senses and makes us perceive things we ordinarily would not notice or pay attention to.

Due to the narrative nature of storytelling, suddenness can be difficult to effectively relay, especially if the GM wishes to ascend above traditional jump-scares. The GM can convey this aspect of the sublime in two ways: Firstly, by describing the events unfolding around the PCs and by surprising the players themselves.

The GM can also introduce elements into the game-environment to affect the players themselves. Examples include: altering her voice for emphasis and/or using sudden gestures and hand movements. Intense body language can accent narrative developments, even making noises, such as slapping the table. Similarly, soundtracks and sound effects can be used to accent shocking moments. However, in both cases, the GM must remember shocks operate under the law of diminishing returns. The more they're used, the less effective they become.

- **World**: The solar flare knocks out all electronics overnight. By morning, much of the world has returned to a pre-industrialized state – no internet, no phones, no power or water. Chaos reigns everywhere. The *Others* emerge from the darkness.
- **World**: Cellphone and CCTV videos circulate on the news and Internet. They show *The Event* from numerous angles, yet cannot truly capture the immensity of the moment when the Angel appeared above the city square. Hoax or reality, no one remains the same after witnessing its terrible beauty.
- **Surrounding**: The autopsy documents the cause of death as stroke. Yet, he had no symptoms or warnings, living each day like the last. Now, there's simply a hole in your life where he once were.
- **Surrounding**: When you come home from your sleepover at a friend's place after the New Year's party, you find your entire block cordoned off, firefighters and police questioning everyone in the streets. Your apartment is a charred ruin after a fire presumably caused by stray fireworks.

- **Internal**: The silence is broken by something loud and harsh. Then quiet darkness settles over you once more. Did you imagine it? What was it? Was it inside your home? How can you sleep tonight, if you don't go look?
- **Internal**: You'll always remember where you were when you first heard of it. JFK. 9/11. The Trump election. The first Covid lockdown. Your wife's infidelity. Your son's accident. There was your world before the tragedy and the world after. Things can never be the same again.

ALARMING SENSORY PERCEPTIONS

Throughout history, humanity has lived in a hostile world, populated with unknown dangers. Although diminished, our senses remain sharp and easily alerted, while our evolved minds quickly detect even subtle changes to our surroundings. As such, certain alarming stimuli may force instinctive reactions, such as fight, flight, or freeze. These primal reactions remain much the same, no matter what form the stimulus takes. Unfortunately, these responses to threatening circumstances can conflict with one another, throwing us into confusion, hesitation, and even paralyzing terror – all manifestations of the sublime.

In each case, the unease that is caused by these **Alarming Sensory Perceptions** is born out of uncertainty. Either we are unable to identify the origins of these fearful sensations, and we find ourselves conflicted in our response to them – either to immediately retreat or investigate further to gain increased insight. Both actions promise to rid us of the unease and uncertainty, but both can invite unpleasant circumstances. We must weigh *our fear versus our curiosity*. Alternatively, we may perceive this unknown as an immediate threat, which we must retreat from or attack. We must weigh *our fear versus our aggression*. Sublime terror exists in that moment of uncertainty, the frozen moment where we examine our options with little to no knowledge of the ultimate outcome.

Alarming sensory perceptions can be used to narratively accent other aspects of the sublime. Used in this way, they reflect the aspect's most menacing, unsettling, or intriguing elements, intensifying the emotional response. Nor are they limited to one sense, but can incorporate several. For example, the aspect of *obscurity* can be demonstrated by literally removing the PCs' senses, plunging them into complete darkness. Smells and sensations can reflect *sibylline* horrors, adding strange and unpleasant physicality to them. *Suddenness* can manifest in unexpected and crippling pain – or just a subtle change in the atmosphere, such as temperature or background noises. Narratively, the GM overwhelms the PCs with these various sights, smells, and sensations, casting them into doubt and despair, while making the experience memorable and surreal.

Mechanically, these sensations and sounds intensify the conversation by ***Putting The PCs in a Bad Spot***, confronting them with hard choices. Additionally, *alarming sensory perceptions* can induce curiosity and intrigue in the players, allowing the GM to ***Offer an Opportunity (With or Without a Price)***. These perceptions can hint at clearly dangerous situations; ***Announce Future Problems***, ***Announce Off-Screen Problems***, or both, as the case may be. And when the players are paralyzed with worry and indecision, caught between following their opposing instincts, the GM can force them into action by asking, "*What do you do?*"

Intermittent Sounds

Barely audible or not clearly identifiable sounds are products of the sublime. Be they natural, manmade, or unnatural sounds, we instinctively respond to these menacing soundscapes, experiencing gnawing dread.

- You hear a low, droning noise. Although impossible to pinpoint, it follows you wherever you go, retaining its constant, near-inaudible volume.
- Miles from Zug Island, people frequently hear a vague electric buzzing in the air. This phenomenon is so persistent it has become known as the *Zug Island Hum*. Although many assume it originates from the dense concentration of large machines in the area, its true source remains elusive.
- Metropolis's desolate landscape resonates with intermittent rattles and clanking, echoing off the broken buildings. They come from every direction, sometimes close, sometimes distant. Are they machines, just the wind in the ruins, or is something alive out there? It's impossible to tell.

A Creature's Cry

The natural world instinctively unnerves us. Bestial cries, pitifully wounded or fueled with rage, tormented rasps, low growls, or mournful howls: all fill us with sublime fear. Some sounds immediately dredge up nightmarish images of creatures beyond our imagination, entities undefined by myth or science.

- In your dreams, they call to you. Screeching, chittering words you feel you once knew. You yearn to answer them, feeling the sounds form on your tongue. But then you awaken and are plunged back into ignorance and fear.
- A rumbling echoes through the caverns. A low mixture of growls and barks. Other voices join it: shrieks, howls, and weeping. No animal should make those sounds.
- Laboured breaths whisper from behind your bedroom wall. Or is it the roof? Or beneath the floor? The rasps become groans, drawn out in pain. How can you sleep here again?
- Myths about sirens are still told by sailors, but none have actually ever met one. Except you. You'll never forget the drawn-out wailing, calling you from the lake's black waters.

Stench and Bitterness

Smells and tastes evoke some of the strongest emotions, including sublime fear. They're internally tied to our memories, which we respond to instinctively. Many serve as warnings to us, announcing sickness and death. For this reason, we're repulsed by all things putrescent and befouled, such as feces, spoiled food, and sour sweat. Chemical stinks offend us: industrial sewage, burnt rubber, sulfuric acid, and household gas. Death and sickness repel us from bloated corpses and festering wounds. And yet, some compel us with their sickly sweet stench, inspiring morbid temptations.

Of all tastes, bitterness triggers the most vehement responses, as our bodies struggle to reject the offending intruder. Even when we fight through our revulsion from smell, this defensive measure fights to save us from poisonous and corruptive foods and substances. In horror, many times we must endure these assaults on the senses to survive. In other cases, we have little choice, as vile tastes are forced upon us.

- You stumble out of the warehouse, drenched in blood, fighting to regain your senses. Your nose and mouth are filled with copper and iron, clinging to every breath.
- The childhood photo triggers dismal memories. You can taste bitter medicines in your mouth, causing your eyes to water.
- Death drifts on the breeze, the charnel stink invading your nose and throat. Beyond the gate, the smell becomes overwhelming. Carcasses line the ground, bloated with foul gases. An hour in, you can't seem to remember what fresh air tastes like.
- *Re-Pulse*, the popular energy drink, smells every bit as disgusting as its name suggests. Few can stomach the first few sips, and struggle to force down the bittersweet chemicals. Yet, those who do swiftly become addicted.

MORBID ATTRACTION

As human beings, we are intrinsically passionate creatures. Eroticism and sex often attract and delight us, and many of us are thrilled by any opportunity to indulge our carnality. We can seek similar pleasures beyond the flesh, such as through the rush of drugs, music, gambling, money, or fame. It could be the thrill of pursuing forbidden knowledge, seeking ritual items hidden in ancient tombs, or listening to the divine songs of Forgotten Gods. So much of our world can fulfill our aching, wanting souls, drawing us in with their sensual promises.

Our passions crave fulfillment, but with the most exquisite pleasures also come the greatest risks. When we are suspended between the siren's call of hedonistic pursuit and the dangers naturally inherent in such transgressions, we experience sublime terror where beauty and fear overlap. Our minds are paralyzed with contradicting sensations, and we hesitate with bated breath before daring to take that decisive, final step.

Morbid Attraction combines well with the aspects of *magnificence*, *obscurity*, *power*, and the *sibylline*. Due to its intensity and potential dangers, it can also play well into the aspects of *hardship* and *suddenness*. Furthermore, the sublime intimacy of this concept lends itself well to *alarming sensory perception*.

In the greater cosmology of ***KULT: Divinity Lost,*** the Archon Tiphareth's Principle of *Allure* is strong and virtually omnipresent in our lives. However, our True Passions are ultimately even greater than that, ingrained into our lost divinity. These primal hungers, long slumbering and suppressed, lurk just beneath the surface, waiting to be unleashed. When fully Awakened, our True Passions aren't constrained by conscience or consequences; they only seek satisfaction for our bottomless appetites.

Deprived of their divinity, those who pursue their Passion's calling tread perilous paths. In our Sleeping state, human Passions are greater than us, and liable to devour us whole. In our relentless quest for the ultimate erotic fulfillment, we find ourselves pulled to the extremes. Our debaucheries and revelries can set us free, but can also lead us to ruin. Once we abandon the safe confines of Tiphareth's shallow allures, we venture into the dangerous borderlands of Passion, Madness, and Death.

Beyond the Illusion, we can experience pleasures far above anything we could have previously imagined. Here, the borders between enlightenment and perversion, attraction and repulsion, and ecstasy and self-destruction break down, losing their meaning. At these intersections, we discover the sublime, infused with wonder and terror, as we face the horrible consequences that our morbid desires and ruinous obsessions have led to.

Perverse Terrors

At its core, *morbid attraction* replies on contrasts, such as those between pleasure and perversity. Narratively, the GM should strive to be both compelling and repelling, thus inspiring sublime horror. This dichotomy excites through literature, such as the infamous *femme fatale* and *handsome devil* tropes. Instinctively, we recognize the danger they represent to us, yet cannot help but be allured by their charms.

Once we succumb to temptations, even against our better judgment, we abandon our ordinary, secure lives, and begin traveling a dangerous path. This enticing journey fills us with excitement and pleasure, making us rationalize or ignore the risks we clearly see ahead. Mechanically, the GM can reflect this allure and fascination by requiring ***Keep it Together*** rolls to overcome seductive influences. If they fail, a PC might gain temporary Disadvantages or additional Dramatic Hooks.

Morbid attractions may expand well beyond more mundane concepts. Passions can lead us astray, compelling us to seek out desires and pleasures most consider bizarre, perverse, and even revolting. Numerous paraphilias push back the boundaries of mortality and safety, forcing us to indulge in dangerous and disgusting behaviors. The allure of death, pain, and power can twist us beyond recognition.

Beyond the Illusion, these boundaries can be tested even further. We encounter irresistible fascinations. Indulging them becomes more important than anything else. We throw all caution, reason and self-preservation to the wind, and offer ourselves fully to these new sensations.

Ultimately, we must face the consequences of the deplorable depths and magnificent heights we've explored. This moment of truth can potentially shatter us. The realization can be slow and gradual, coming to us over time, or shock us in some startling self-discovery. Either way, we are overwhelmed, thrown into sublime confusion. If we're lucky, we'll ascend above and beyond this degradation, abandoning our path to destruction. Or, the realization may twist and break us, crippling us mentally and emotionally. We may become hopelessly enslaved to our desires or irrevocably trapped by blinding obsessions. In rare cases, this may be a moment of Awakening, opening our eyes to our True Nature.

Mechanically, when a PC becomes *Broken* due to **Stability** loss related to *morbid attractions*, the GM may choose to give them a new Disadvantage as per the normal rules, such as ***Sexual Neurosis***, ***Victim of Passion***, ***Obsession***, or ***Drug Addiction***. If their mental deterioration progresses beyond this, the GM may determine the PC becomes *Enlightened* – gaining a Limitation, such as ***Bloodthirst***, ***Bound to Higher Power***, ***Cannibalism***, ***Symbol Bondage***, or ***Uncontrolled Shapeshifting*** depending on the circumstances.

- **World**: Scandal hangs over the reclusive rockstar, charged for her criminal proclivities. Yet, fans flock to her hotel, begging to catch a glimpse of her. They do anything to receive one of her coveted invites upstairs. Those who are granted this honor return quieter, more distant, yet more enthralled than ever.
- **World**: An edgy television series, *Love Undying*, gains surprising popularity. It portrays the romanticism of vampiric affections and necrophiliac activities in a stylishly erotic veneer. Not long after its broadcast, several fans break in into local morgues and cemeteries.
- **Surrounding**: Beneath the streets, below the sewers, the bloated thing rests in exquisite putrescence. Its water-logged flesh and open sores exude the sweetest nectar, the perfume scent making you giddy. Its deformed children collect the sensual spillage, refining it into silvery dust. A single taste drives you beyond pleasure and rationality. You will protect this thing and its brood, serving them faithfully for one more hit.
- **Surrounding**: You keep getting ads for the new private nightclub called *Serafim Sensual*, promising "Debaucheries for Refined Tastes" and "Pleasures Beyond Belief." The building's discreetly walled-off parking lot is packed almost every night. You see an open spot, waiting for you.
- **Internal**: Logically, you *know* using the drug will ruin you. Emotionally, it's the only thing that makes you feel strong and whole again, even for a little while. One last hit? Just to take the edge off.
- **Internal**: You watch them. How he verbally abuses her. Commands her to do lewd acts in plain view. Undressing, walking on all fours. Pressing her against the apartment window, as he takes her completely. But the look on her face is ecstasy, not fear. That look awakened something in you. A craving you dared not share with anyone, especially not your spouse.

CHAPTER 10

PRISONERS OF THE SELF

THEY TELL YOU IT GOES AWAY, THAT IT GETS BETTER.

Bullshit. They can't guarantee that.

Do you know how many nights I've laid awake, afraid to even reach for the bottle to force myself to sleep? Have I told you I check all of my locks to make sure They don't come back? I have to build myself up to making a phone call, otherwise I'll feel the hot breath on my neck and expect to be shoved into the wall. My nose has mostly healed from being broken, but it still hurts on bad days.

The worst part is, I know they're out there. They can't die. I don't care what anyone says. They cannot, and will not, ever leave me alone.

I can't go to sleep. They'll get me.

OVERVIEW

In *KULT: Divinity Lost*, the human soul remains under constant assault, slowly eroded by an onslaught of traumas from within and without. Many resist this spiritual corrosion, weathering the storm or fighting against it. Others are overwhelmed, their fractured psyches creating new lies in order to survive. Some alter their perceptions to dispel these torments, while others completely deny and withdraw from reality, splintering the Illusion in the process.

Prisons of the Self explores emotional, mental, and physical traumas, and how they can be incorporated into the conversation. This chapter should not simply be about suffering, but provide hope, as well. The GM should pay close attention to the *Horror Contract* when incorporating this subject matter. Regrettably, trauma is far closer and more real than one might believe.

Please note that every example in this chapter comes with an attached question. This is due to the chapter being primarily about how one internalizes terrifying and destructive events. GMs and Players alike are encouraged to engage with similar questions when playing out traumatic horror.

BOUND, CAGED, AND ABANDONED

You've probably heard the word "trauma" before, tossed out like a joke. "Don't traumatize the poor child." "Oh no, I'm so traumatized!" You may have heard it in a TV show or from friends who work in the medical industry, talking about traumatic injuries or trauma surgery. You may think you have a good idea of what trauma means – it's a sudden injury, right? Something that doesn't go away easily, but can be fixed with enough skill applied quickly enough, and the trauma victim can hug their family at the end of the episode, fully repaired.

You're half right.

Dr. Judith Herman, in her seminal work Trauma and Recovery, described trauma as follows:

> *At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meanin. Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe.*

Traumatic events, therefore, cover an astounding range of events. Natural disasters, attempted murder, child abuse, school shootings, war, rape and incest, attempted suicide, psychotic breaks, car crashes, overdoses, seeing someone else die, imprisonment in a foreign country – anything that would force someone to face just how powerless they are is traumatic. Trauma may cause damage to the mind, the body, or both.

Not only are traumatic memories as long-lasting as other memories, they are also encoded in the mind differently. Traumatic memories live in the limbic system, the part of the mind that deals only with emotions and reflexive responses (you may have heard this referred to as the id or the lizard brain) instead of being processed through the hippocampus and the cortex. What this means is that the trauma survivor may have either perfect memories of the event, or none at all, but their body will react as though they were in that situation either way. A traumatic memory is literally a reflex – the body senses similar situations and reacts accordingly, giving the mind "helpful" little nudges along the way, such as flashbacks, mood swings, panic attacks, etc.

KULT: Divinity Lost deals with traumatic themes and events on a regular basis. It's important to note that it is possible that at least one of your players will have dealt with mental illness, addiction, sexual violence, family violence, natural disasters, or any number of other of things This doesn't mean you can't address these topics, but it's important to be open and honest about doing so. Consider your horror as you put it on the table for your players to devour, and allow them to contribute in ways they feel comfortable doing so.

What follows are descriptions of traumatic events, and how to handle them at the table – definitions of certain terms and techniques you can use to approach sensitive topics are included in the *Introduction*. This essay does not cover all possible traumatic events – that would be impossible – but the general concepts within can be expanded to cover most events that could crop up during your sessions.

THE FIRST RULE OF TRAUMA HORROR IS...

Never, ever use your game as exposure therapy to a traumatic memory or event unless a player explicitly and enthusiastically consents to it and/or you are a professional therapist with a treatment plan that your patient has consented to that includes RPGs. You are not being helpful. You are not being caring. You are a bully who wants to hold your friend's head in an emotional toilet for your own enjoyment, and you should feel bad.

Roleplaying Trauma and Its Consequences

Traumatic events do not have to be cinematic. Relationship trauma, for example, can be the constant erosion of your sense of personhood, day after day, by snide comments, subtle threats, and cruel "jokes" at your expense. Trauma can be feeling like your body isn't yours, as if it's an inconvenience or a toy for someone else's amusement. Trauma is not feeling safe anywhere, bracing for the slap, the sharp word, or the violent sound.

Books like V.C. Andrews' ***Flowers in the Attic*** and Gillian Flynn's ***Sharp Objects***, and roleplaying games like ***Bluebeard's Bride***, show us the horror of being completely under someone else's malicious control, which you can either surrender to or fight to tear yourself free (and very possibly fail). While the villains in these texts are (mostly) human, that same sense of terror and obligation is very easy to introduce into ***KULT*** stories. Indeed, it's one of the major themes of the game. We are all trapped in an Illusion created by Higher Powers beyond our understanding, and they are continually watching us, manipulating us and abusing us.

When playing with traumatic events, remember the Boiling Frog model. A frog dropped into a boiling pot will immediately leap out. But, if you place a frog in cold water and very gradually turn up the heat, it will boil to death rather than jump out. Start slow with your players. Introduce them to something unnerving that they can brush off, then lean into it. Make them accept this new normal, or fight against it. Yet, always introduce consequences for struggling against their fate. The Illusion can be pointlessly and artfully cruel, sometimes both at the same time. Have it test them, see how they react, and then build the story from there.

Abuse

What comes to mind when you hear the word "abuse"? The childhood abuse chronicled in Dave Pelzer's ***A Child Called "It"***? A woman cringing in the corner as a bulky shadow looms over her? Cracking whips and biting chains? Popular depictions of abuse display an unequal power relationship with no escape, and cruel acts committed by an uncaring perpetrator.

As with many traumatic topics in popular media, this is a half-truth. Abuse does involve an unequal power relationship between the abuser and the victim, constructed from violence, gaslighting, emotional harm, coercion, and uncertainty. The victim is made to feel obligated to the abuser – they hold the money, or the parental rights, or are the first person to make the victim feel loved – and if the victim leaves, they will lose everything they value.

Two main types of non-institutional abuse frequently occur in *KULT* – Familial and Partner. *Familial Abuse* occurs within the family structure. Most of its victims are children and teenagers abused by adults, which is why it is often called "child abuse." However, elders can be abused by younger adults, and siblings can abuse each other. Familial abuse presents an extremely sticky situation – oftentimes, only one or two victims are singled out for abuse, while others might be lavished with praise and gifts. Familial abuse does not usually require "love bombing" (see below), either because the abuser uses the family's well-being against the victim, or the abuse is normalized. The abused child grows up never knowing safety – robbed of their security by the open hand that leaves bruises, forced starvation, incessant screaming, incest (physical or emotional), gaslighting, emotional invalidation, or the deceptive periods in-between when their tormentor acts almost normal and loving. Familial abuse is also often intergenerational. While abused children do not usually become abusers themselves, they may do so accidentally, thinking that because they are "only" slapping their children and not belting them, they are not abusive.

Partner Abuse has to be more carefully structured because the partner is not tied to the abuser by family. Instead, the abuser begins with an initial period of *love bombing* – lavishing the victim with gifts, praise, promises of love or marriage, etc. This sets an ideal sense of normal, so that when the abuser begins to slowly testing boundaries and limits, the victim has something to strive for – even as the true emotional, physical, and/or sexual harm begins. They can never reobtain that state of perfection, of course. The abuse is a shaping attack, much like the purgatories created by nepharites – it is meant to render the victim compliant, and eventually transform them into the perfect vessel for the abuser's cruelty. Partner abuse is much like family abuse in that speaking out about it is penalized and trying to escape is often much more dangerous (at least temporarily) than staying where it's "safe" (i.e., normal and under the abuser's thumb).

There is a common saying among abuse survivors: "If you have never seen someone fold a sock angrily before, you won't get it." Abuse is not just when they're hitting you or telling you you're a fuckup. Abuse is when your family dismissively says, "Oh, he's just like that sometimes," or "She has a bit of a temper." Abuse is when you get dressed up specifically to hide the bruises. Abuse is discovering that being held on the floor by your parents, slapping and screaming at you accusingly for their problems *isn't normal*, and none of your friends know the "you're in for it" look. Abuse is constant isolation, destruction, and terror – inflicted on a very personal scale.

How to use it: Abuse is rampant in Elysium and Metropolis, as the Illusion's underlying structure is based on the deeply unequal power relationship between humanity and Higher Powers. Those above torture those below. This inequality extends all the way down, where the Archons' and Death Angels' malice plays out on a micro scale. The system is inherently broken, so most relationships are broken. It is also a vicious circle where those that are able to climb upwards in power and prestige are more prone to start abusing those below. Making us wrestle with ourselves and taking the focus away from our imprisonment. Abuse is a reflection of both the worst of ourselves and our prison's keepers. Abuse is not sexy or titillating. Abuse is violence and coercion and the worst of humanity.

The most common use of abuse in your ***KULT*** game will likely involve characters' Dark Secrets, such as ***Family Secret*** or ***Victim of Crime***. Children may have been abused by their parents to gain occult power, to appease a dark entity, or simply out of their own maliciousness. Partners of any gender may abuse each other for the same reasons. If Archetypes like *The Broken* or *The Doll* are your story, then this is even more likely – and may continue to influence the overall narrative.

Remember that the effect of abuse lingers on even once the abusive scene has ended, its effects continue afterwards. For abuse victims and survivors, player characters and NPCs alike, everything is not fine once the scene concludes. They might suffer flashbacks or panic attacks at inconvenient times, misconstrue things as threatening or violent, lash out in rage or fear, and seek security with people who aren't actually safe. They may be more or less susceptible to supernatural intrusion into their lives, depending on how they deal with their trauma. If the characters are Sleepers, they may repress their memories of abuse, but suffer from ***Nightmares***, ***Obsessions***, or other Disadvantages, pushing them closer to Awareness. This trauma extends beyond the **Stability** rules, possibly weaving into the characters' fiction.

If the PC is the abuser, make sure that he knows the limit of his power. While the character may have control over this one person, things can go wrong and the destructive control they have may slip through their fingers. Abuse victims are not one-dimensional, punching bags – they are humans with their own thoughts, feelings, and divinity. And they may strike back or have others that support and protect them. Scenes of portraying the abuser can be just as hard for the player as being the victim. Make sure that at the end of the game, all players are cared for, and if the abuse needs to be portrayed off-screen, do so.

- **World**: You read the national news on your phone. Another school is embroiled in an abuse scandal. *How do you feel?*
- **World**: The local foster care system desperately needs of new foster parents after several were arrested for keeping their wards on leashes or in the basement. *What do you do?*
- **Surrounding**: You notice your work colleague trying to conceal her bruises with makeup. *What do you say?*
- **Surrounding**: You hear your neighbors arguing loudly. You know they have a young child. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: Her expression matches how your mother used to look at you – disgust and shame. You don't know why. It feels like choking. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: When you arrive at work, you notice everyone is looking at you strangely. Then you see the link in the company email that went out to everyone. *What does it read?*

Addiction

Addiction is a response to suffering. It is an escape from deep emotional traumas that the individual doesn't have the strength, support or tools to deal with. For the addict, the addiction becomes a solution, something that makes their lives bearable. Addiction, like all traumas, exists on a spectrum. Some heal from it, some manage to almost have a "normal" life while supporting their addiction in periods, while others succumb to it completely. In much of the media, addictions are seen as the result of personal failure, mental illness or overindulgence.

Addictions are not simply to drugs or alcohol, however; one can be addicted to gambling, sex, thrill-seeking, shopping, the internet, or anything else that causes a rush of neurotransmitters. When people cannot find happiness in their communities, they turn to anything that will sustain them. If society fails, addiction takes hold.

Addiction, then, is not just a physical phenomenon, but an emotional one as well. The addict isn't somehow quintessentially evil or selfish, but is living an isolated existence. Addiction may be a response to stress, loneliness, a poor living situation, or other trauma. Alcoholics Anonymous and other groups who deal with addiction stress healthy relationships, mental health, and other non-chemical solutions due to this reason.

How to use it: Finding an addict in the world of *KULT* is casually easy. Many Aware have taken to drinking, smoking, or harder drugs simply to forget what they've seen and convince themselves that everything is fine. Others use drugs to actually see more of the world, to pierce the lie, and may now need it to stare into the world of dreams, or hear the voice of a dead child that still echoes in the basement.

- **World**: A newscaster talks about the opioid epidemic with a mixture of amusement and disgust. *How does it make you feel?*
- **World**: The local government utilizes a study on addicts, which states they are just lazy and shiftless. The study's sources are all outdated or refer to deleted websites. *What do you do?*
- **Surrounding**: Your friend comes over, crying. Their breath smells of alcohol. *What do you do?*
- **Surrounding**: Your sister can't get her pain medication. The pharmacist accuses her of being a junkie. *How do you respond to their accusation?*
- **Internal**: You go into rehab. It's the first time you can see things clearly – a little too clearly. Maybe you drank to cope with the actual horror of the world, but maybe getting sober will allow you to deal with it. *How does this change you?*
- **Internal**: You are so lonely. Every day feels grey. Only the pipe helps, and when it's taken away, you are adrift again. *What will you do to feel that high again?*

Chronic and Mental Illness

Unlike some other sources of trauma, illnesses that dissolve the relationships between mind and body are ongoing. They cannot be cured, only treated, and while they are not death sentences, illnesses that stay with you can feel like your own personal grim reaper.

Chronic illness refers to any physical illness that can be managed but stays within the sufferer for years or decades, until it goes into remission or the host dies. Crohn's disease, fibromyalgia, asthma, and the various types of cancer are all chronic illnesses. Sufferers and survivors of a chronic disease may experience long-term joint pain, trouble breathing, vomiting, exhaustion, and other symptoms. While this all seems relatively harmless, like having the flu, imagine that you have the flu every day for the rest of your life. Normal tasks, such as cooking, making the bed, or seeing friends, all become arduous. A sufferer feels like they're losing control of their body, as though they're driving a malfunctioning car at full speed down a highway that isn't fully paved. This continuous struggle between the Body and Self paves the way for dysphoria (a strong sense of unease or dissatisfaction with one's body), self-loathing, and other, darker issues. In addition, since many people of think illness as something that can be cured with a single prescription, chronic illness sufferers may be labeled as hypochondriacs, malingerers, or even sufferers of Munchausen Syndrome, simply trying to gain sympathy and attention rather than having actual health issues.

Mental illness can be chronic or acute, but it always affects the mind in a deep and lasting way. Like chronic illness, it involves a disconnection between the body and the self, but this time between the brain and the perception of self. Suffering from mental illness is much like having any other illness, except the malfunction is in the brain. It can be treated, possibly even cured, through therapy, support, and medication – so long as the sufferer consents and the treatment supports their growth instead of their compliance. Non-consensual treatment can harm someone with mental illness more than it helps (see ***Incarceration and Torture*** below). In addition, mental illness is still deeply stigmatized in most societies, so those living with something even as common as anxiety or depression may be shunned and stigmatized for seeking help.

Mental and chronic illness do not automatically designate someone as an adversary. People are complicated, and while survival behaviors may be toxic, they can be overcome. The mentally and chronically ill are more likely to harm themselves than other people, so avoid explaining away the actions of an antagonist as "psychotic" or "because he was disturbed."

How to use it: In *KULT* many who are suffering from mental or chronic illness live closer to the Truth than the rest of us. Their souls realize something is fundamentally wrong, and this knowledge claws and tears at their bodies and minds. Deep within them lurks the cold, yet vague, insight that they are only a broken shard of something greater, a disfigured creature in a penitentiary where their fellow inmates can't even see the bars of the prison. This does not mean that this is somehow less real or traumatic. Even if a character's depression is directly caused by a nepharite feeding on them, this does not make that depression any less valid or meaningful to that character or their well-being.

Mental illnesses can also be caused by any of the other traumas in this chapter, or a Dark Secret. A mind that has learned to hate itself or try to protect itself from outside incursion continues to do so unless given proper attention and support.

When using mental illnesses in ***KULT*** first read the chapter Beyond Madness in the core rules (*KDL*, p. 242). To get a decent idea of how to play someone suffering from a mental or chronic physical illness, first look up the symptoms in reputable sources such as the ***DSM-V***. For players who want to explore an illness further, look for books, articles, zines, and journals written by people who suffer from the condition you intend to present. These will give you a good idea of how to incorporate them into the Illusion's manifestation and, ultimately, the conversation. Decide if you want to tie the condition to a supernatural manifestation only once you've researched it.

- **World**: Healthcare for mental health and chronic conditions is up for political debate. Its detractors have designated mentally and chronically ill people as being a drain on society. *Which side do you fall on in this debate?*
- **World**: Politicians are running on platforms decrying "unnecessary" regulations, like wheelchair ramps and handrails. Disability rights are sliding back decades. *Do you fight back?*
- **Surrounding**: A coworker has a panic attack after another plays a practical joke on them. *What do you do?*
- **Surrounding**: Your friend's parents accuse her of being "delusional" and "psychotic" for choosing to marry someone they don't approve of. *How do you respond?*
- **Internal**: You know they'll leave you, if they find out. Every single one of them. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: Something makes you feel like you're choking. Your breath is short. You want to vomit. You're in pain, it feels like dying. You've had these symptoms before and nothing happened. But this time feels different. *Is it really different and why?*

MADNESS IN KULT

In real life, the term "Madness" is often used as a pejorative to describe people with traumatic disorders, mental illness, or simply unexpected modes of behavior. Social activists, escaped slaves, and women who had premarital sex were all described as mad at one point or another, and treated with all the gentleness that a carceral system insists they deserve.

Characters in *KULT: Divinity Lost* may describe others as "crazy" or "mad" depending on their outlooks, and what's covered in the *Horror Contract*. However, capital-M Madness, as explained in these books, is not a catch-all term for "crazies" or "psychos". Madness is the reaction of the human mind and soul to its imprisonment, the divine struggle against the isolation of Elysium. It may manifest as ecstasy, fury, abject sadness, or any number of other emotions and outward expressions.

Incarceration and Torture

Incarceration, whether criminal or psychiatric, refers to a state in which people are locked in an institution and placed under someone's strict authority and continual observation. Mental hospitals, prisons, juvenile detention centers, and concentration camps are the obvious examples. One could argue that orphanages, group foster homes, and boarding schools also fall under this purview. In its many forms, incarceration comes with an attached stigma and the humiliation of being "put away" can be a traumatic experience, in of itself. Within the institution, the confined person's trauma further increases. Fellow inmates and patients form social cliques, asserting their power over and/or shunning each other. All basic human needs are severely restricted, such as contact with the outside world, space to move freely, basic hygiene, food, and even clothing. Guards, orderlies, or other caretakers are predisposed to believe that their charges are troublemakers, cannot be trusted, and deserve punishment.

Corporal punishment can take many forms. In even the "best" prisons and psychiatric hospitals, tools such as restraints, forced medications, solitary confinement, and loss of privileges are not unheard of. As conditions worsen, so do the treatments. Stress positions, sleep and food deprivation, beatings, electric shocks, sexual assault, and other forms of prolonged abuse are all employed in "black sites" managed by espionage and security companies all over the world.

How to use it: The Illusion is one massive prison, confining our bodies, minds, and souls. Humans are robbed of their divinity and herded into close quarters – enslaved by jailers who believe fear that we will awaken and escape. Incarceration is the day-to-day life of an Aware or Enlightened character, and earthly prisons and hospitals are simply reflections of that.

The GM should stress Elysium's confining nature. Even without lictors, nepharites, and razides, correctional facilities and prisons are grim and cheerless. While psychiatric hospitals or orphanages might attempt at being welcoming, they usually only result in making their institutions glossy and clinical. Supernatural elements are only there to reinforce the larger terrors lurking out there – unseen, yet watching through the walls of your prison. You are caged and helpless, subject to harsh treatments that can harm even the most resilient person. Guards, orderlies, and attendants force inmates into compliance, often with tortures that affect the aggressor as much as the victim, while trustees focus more on meeting quotas than providing care and rehabilitation. Outside, people consider the "crazies" and "criminals" like an infectious disease, something to be caged and contained.

It can also be extremely traumatic to incarcerate someone in *KULT: Divinity Lost*. Elysium's prisons and psychiatric institutions are well-known for their inherent brutality – but what if someone you love suffers from possession or Madness? What if they've fallen in with cultists or Magicians? You can't trust them to be on their own (probably), and you can't lock them up in the house all day. Out of guilt, fear, or simply a sense of isolation, a PC may feel forced to incarcerate a loved one, and that can shake even the most hardened badass.

- **World**: A hurricane destroys a local prison that was not evacuated. Hundreds of prisoners are dead or missing, and the police and officials are not aiding their families. *How do you react to this news?*
- **World**: Newscasters decry the release of "crazies" from the regional psychiatric hospital, claiming that patients are dangerous. *How does this make you feel?*
- **Surrounding**: A family member is involuntarily hospitalized. He begs you to get him out. The hospital insists he is noncompliant and cannot be released. *What do you do?*
- **Surrounding**: Without bail, your friend awaits trial at a maximum security prison. You know she didn't commit the crime. She tries calling you for help, obviously at her breaking point. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: The doctors constantly punish you for being noncompliant. But, if you just take all the pills and stop acting out, they'll let you go. Except you're constantly panicking and don't know how to survive this. Something terrible lives inside your head and you can't get it out – and no one believes you. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: People look at you differently ever since you've gotten out, almost like you've contracted a disease. Landing a job is almost impossible. Couch-surfing has become a habit. *How do you survive?*

Natural Disasters, Accidents, and Terrorism

Most large-scale, cataclysmic events outside of armed conflicts fall into this category. Although this category is far-reaching, the more common events are addressed individually below. The element linking them together is that no singular human cause can be blamed, and they also affect dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of humans. *Communal trauma* may become a major factor in any of these catastrophes – many survivors struggling to heal themselves, each other, and their community as a whole. These traumas can even be felt globally, touching people with little or no connection to the affected region.

Natural disasters such as tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, and wildfires are commonplace. They destroy houses and infrastructure, split families, and force major relocations of populations and resources. Trauma from natural disasters can result in phobias, compulsive behaviors, and nightmares. As affected survivors rally, the government and private corporations may see the locals as threatening the stability of the area. People who take food to feed others are "looters". Those who resist occupation by military forces are "insurgents". Newspapers fill with stories of the survivors being driven insane while kind (and wealthy!) outsiders do everything they can to help -- for a given value of "help".

Accidents range from common car accidents to sudden bridge collapses to massive catastrophes like nuclear meltdowns. Whatever tragedy occurs, it typically inflicts trauma to bodies and minds. Because accidents can be from negligence or pure randomness, they tend to reside in an odd place between natural disasters and terrorist attacks. Humans involved with the accident, be they rescue workers, drivers, plant workers, or otherwise, may be blamed for its cause and aftermath – even if they did everything they could.

Terrorism is political violence inflicted on a nation by a non-national actor – usually a single person or a small group of people driven any number of motives. Oftentimes, it's radicalized young men who've found their life's purpose in committing violence for an ideology and/or belief, whether religious or social. Survivors of terrorism may withdraw from public life or speak out against the group that committed the act. Others suffer survivor's guilt, traumatizing themselves for being spared.

How to use it: In the world of *KULT*, true coincidence and randomness are rare. The Illusion is guided and affected by Higher Powers rather than random chaos (see ***Existential Horror***). Who knows what was born from the national trauma of the school shooting? What being of Nahemoth that crawled up from inferno when the Tsunami swept in?

- **World**: The contaminants at the Fukushima reactor crack, pouring radioactive waste into the ocean. *How does this affect you?*
- **World**: Violent political movements have taken a significant rise near you. *How do you feel?*
- **Surrounding**: Your parent is hospitalized after a head-on collision with a drunk driver. The other driver is fine. *What do you do?*
- **Surrounding**: Your neighborhood is in the path of a hurricane, and you don't have a basement. *Where do you seek shelter?*
- **Internal**: There is a bomb scare at your workplace, but your colleagues strangely ignore it. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: The roadway begins cracking. A sinkhole swallows the car in front of you – a frightened child staring helplessly through the back window. *What do you do?*

Rape and Sexual Violence

Rape and sexual assault occur when someone's ability to provide consent is not respected or goes ignored. It may take on many forms: the rare direct assaults by a stranger in some dark park, drugged and raped without any clear memories of the event, gang rapes in a college dorm, prison rapes, revenge rapes, spousal rapes, date rapes where the partners tries to joke it off, rape during war, rape in the home. The list goes on.

In the countries where rapes are reported, millions of men and women are sexually assaulted every year. This statistic does not include nonbinary or transgendered people, who are at an even higher risk for sexual violence than others. And these incidents are only the ones *reported*. The real numbers are many, many more. In many cultures rapes might result in the victim being punished or even blamed for the incident, and the family will be shamed.

The oppressive force driving sexual violence is *silence* – both denying the victim's right to consent, and prohibiting them from speaking out afterwards for fear of persecution. In the worst cases, the victim is murdered to ensure their silence. Judith Herman, in ***Trauma and Recovery***, said, *"In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure no one listens."* A woman drugged and assaulted at a party obviously couldn't keep her knees together. A man can't be raped by his partner because men "always want it." If they say they were forced to fellate their uncle, they're lying because things like that don't happen in *nice* families.

How to use it: There is a good reason very few roleplaying games tackle sexual violence, except perhaps as backstory justifications. Dealing with violations to the body and mind is not easy and should be handled with care and empathy. Nor will everyone agree on what constitutes sexual violence and what does not. This subject matter can become especially fraught if one of the players was the target of sexual violence in real life. As such, it must be handled with the utmost care as part of the *Horror Contract*.

If you introduce rape into your game don't make it sexy or titillating. Don't make it some trite revenge-backstory motivation, never mentioned again after the rapists are dead. Rape is a very real experience of violation that turns your character's world inside-out. Much like playing characters with chronic or mental illness, characters suffering from rape trauma do not feel safe inside their own body. They may experience numerous symptoms, such as panic attacks, body flashbacks where they freeze, periods of helplessness, overwhelming shame, nausea, nightmares, and other Disadvantages. Even if the assaulter apologizes or tries to make reparations, that feeling of terror and vulnerability does not simply go away.

There are powers in the ***KULT*** mythology, such as the Death Angels Chagdiel and Gamaliel whose influences both feed on and strengthen the destructive cycle of sexual abuse. Among the creatures of Passion there are broken and twisted beings such as various forms of darthea or the libith that seek bodily sexual encounters without limitations and considerations. With that said, most monsters in ***KULT*** are perfectly terrifying without including sexual elements. Presenting your lictor as a rapist doesn't make him somehow more evil than other lictors, *it just makes them a rapist*. Rapist villains may make us feel oddly excited, but if you are focusing on the sexual element instead of the power element, you are portraying rape incorrectly. Rape is about the experience of power and violation. Sexual gratification is peripheral – if even a motivation at all.

If using sexual violations as an element of a ***KULT*** story the cardinal rule is to focus *on the experience of the survivor*. It's not about whether or not they deserved it, the violation happened. As such, they are the ones directly affected by the horror of the assault. If, for some reason, a player decides they want to portray a rapist (make sure this is agreed upon in the *Horror Contract*), ask them why they want to explore that role, and make sure there is a genuine reason other than being shocking or "edgy". As stated above, think carefully, and make sure it is handled with decorum and empathy.

- **World**: A celebrity is accused of multiple rapes and sexual assaults. His supporters insist he is innocent and the survivors are just gold-diggers. *What do you think?*
- **World**: Bloggers are divided over the graphic rape scenes in a popular video game, with some saying it's realistic, while others says it's too gratuitous. *What do you think?*
- **Surrounding**: Your brother lashes out at little things and is drinking heavily. You finally get him to confess that he was sexually assaulted and he feels terrified and ashamed. *What do you do?*

- **Surrounding**: Your coworker won't stop making lewd remarks about women in the office. You hear rumors he's begun following them after hours. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: You receive flowers after being sexually assaulted. The note warns not to tell anyone else or you'll be sorry. *What do you do?*
- **Internal**: You finally tell your parents or friends about your violation. They insist you misunderstood what was happening. They ask if you were drunk or wearing suggestive clothing. *How does this change you?*

War and Other Physical Violence

War, and the threat of war, is ever present in Elysium. Nations spend untold billions each year acquiring and creating deadly hardware. International unrest and remnants of Cold War politics nudges global tensions ever closer to the brink. Suddenly, brutal conflicts erupt in some foreign nation and thousands of young people enlist – or are conscripted – out of duty or necessity. Violence is the way to truly settle disagreements between nations, clans and gangs, or so the logic goes.

In movies and games, we learn that war is glorious and exciting and heroic, when in truth it is chaotic brutality. Mismanaged engagements, officers with bloodlust, pilfered resources, disease and infections, and simple boredom can all disrupt conflicts, causing more death than actual combat. Mines and other booby-traps mutilate without warning – intentionally designed to demoralize, but not kill, the enemy. Jets and bombers attack soft targets like cities and towns with little blowback, and "buzz" (i.e., fly extremely low over at supersonic speeds) problematic areas to pacify them without ammunition.

War is hell, but coming home can be even worse. War survivors, be they veterans or refugees, are weighed down with numerous traumas. They've witnessed things no human should have to see – their friends blown to pieces, their children killed, their homes and businesses destroyed, and their convoys ambushed. In fact, the study of "shell shock," later called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), began with survivors of World War I. War is the "acceptable" trauma, and yet it is rarely addressed. Veterans are frequently told to suck it up and soldier on, refugees are told that they need to return home, that they are unwelcome, that they should be lucky to be alive at all.

How to use it: When playing *KULT: Divinity Lost*, GMs and players alike will encounter violence. Brutality and terror temporarily erodes the Illusion, revealing the horrors beneath. Soldiers and refugees have all seen things they can't explain – a refugee camp borders on Metropolis, while a concentration camp merges with Inferno. Archons and Death Angels such as Netzach, Hareb-Seraph, and to some extent Kether and Thaumiel, flare up like beacons of power during times of conflict. This is a chance for their influence to get an iron grip and gain influence in a new region. Well-meaning people commit atrocities in the name of kin and country, causing their **Stability** to fall. Lictors, razides, jackals, ignytides, and other creatures that can affect a character's emotions may draw them into the endless conflict. In these moments of utter chaos and bloodshed we might sometimes gain a glimpse into our divine souls – from a time when we were gods and free of moral constraints ruptured whole worlds and committed atrocities out of pure pleasure. Here we might be filled with an euphoric bloodlust only to afterwards be traumatized and crying in horror over what overcame us.

In the Illusion few people remain unaffected by killing another sentient being, if they can do it at all. Everyone who comes away from war has scars, whether visible or not. Some Archetypes, such as the Veteran, are marked by it. While many RPGs treat murder as though it were casually and contemptuously easy to commit, *KULT* includes the option to fully enforce the traumatic effect of taking a life. Brushes with death are equally traumatic, knowing that the other person could kill you, dismissing you as a fellow human but simply an enemy to be eliminated.

- **World**: Unrest in the Middle East has pundits speculating on nuclear options. *How do you feel about it?*
- **World**: On Twitter, you read that the Pentagon is going to make an important announcement later today. *Does this make you nervous?*
- **Surrounding**: Your sibling comes back from the front lines, looking thirty years older than they did when they left. *How do you treat them?*
- **Surrounding**: The CDC starts putting out notices about an outbreak of a wartime disease in your hometown, due to returning soldiers. *How do you feel?*
- **Internal**: You were a refugee. You still have nightmares about what you escaped. Sometimes it's hard to not see your home as a new battleground. *What does home look like now?*
- **Internal**: You are in the military reserves, and you never expected to be deployed. You are underprepared and anxious. *What do you do?*

BOOK

BE

III:

ELECTIONS

CHAPTER 11

GODS AND MONSTERS

BITTER WINDS HOWLED OFF THE DETROIT RIVER. MONK FOUGHT TO LIGHT her cigarette, hands shaking from more than the cold. Finally, she managed to get it going, filling her lungs with heat and smoke. Across from her, Xander oozed his way out of the black Dodge. His bulk made the car shudder with relief to be free of him. Even through his winter jacket, Monk could see the inner workings of his guts; mustard-yellow and intestinal pink. His bloated face rested on broad shoulders like a dollop of rancid sour cream. Behind him, two more men exited the vehicle. "We were supposed to meet alone, Xander," Monk said, "Who are your friends?"

"Business associates, Ms. Logan," he chimed. Monk doubted that very much, "I don't like surprises." He shrugged, approaching like a living storm. "Did you bring the money?" Xander ignored her question, stepping forward, his corpulent body looming over her, "The deal's changed, human. Where is the Codex? Hand it over now and we'll make this quick."

Monk idly pointed toward one of Xander's 'associates.' His smug face disappeared, along with most of his head. The gunshot reached them just as his corpse hit the ground. Xander glanced around, fearful. She managed a grin, "Sorry. I brought friends too."

OVERVIEW

The **Gods and Monsters** reflection explores the narratives of urban fantasy and magical realism. Supernatural elements remain ever-present, resonating throughout the fiction and continually affecting the PCs. Hidden amongst humanity, creatures and cultists have formed secret societies, directly working to preserve our prison or tear down its crumbling walls. The wounded Illusion bleeds, dimensions merge with Elysium, and monstrosities stalk our streets. The Higher Powers are no longer indifferent primal forces; they regularly impose their will upon humanity, twisting and perverting it to fulfill their alien goals. The PCs themselves are pawns, caught up in this cosmic game of nightmarish passions and divine powers.

AGENDA

Gods and Monsters shifts the conversation's focus toward grander horrors. Unlike standard games, the Higher Powers and their minions are no longer indistinct and mysterious forces. They actively shape humanity's progression, weaving Elysium to serve their personal needs and wants. The Illusion's grip on reality is tenuous, and permanent portals to other dimensions remain open. Turn any corner and you find yourself in Metropolis' haunted landscapes. Descend a dark stairwell and may enter Inferno's charnel houses. Close your eyes and your dreams come true in Limbo. The Underworld has risen from below, and its bizarre denizens live amongst us. In this dark urban fantasy, the PCs stand with one foot in light and the other in the darkness, their world shrouded in perpetual grey.

In *Gods and Monsters*, our prison doors are open, and the Illusion hangs in tatters. In numerous locations, Elysium and Metropolis effectively coincide, allowing free passage between both sides. Although *Sleepers* remain ignorant of these horrors, their daily existences are continually affected by them. In contrast, the *Aware* PCs recognize these otherworldly events and entities, and are trying to find their place in this nightmare world. Even so, the narrative remains focused on self-discovery and personal horror, as the PCs are integral to the world's progression and supernatural affairs.

Due to this narrative shift, the Agendas differ significantly from standardized ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** games. *Gods and Monsters* also provides the perfect background for incorporating Enlightened Archetypes. Indeed, the GM may base the campaign around these advanced character types.

The Agendas for *Gods And Monsters* are as follows:

- Build an Evolving World of Discovery and Dread.
- Place the Characters at the Conflict's Heart.
- Let the PCs' Actions Advance the Plot, Regardless of Consequences.

Build an Evolving World of Discovery and Dread

First and foremost, the GM and players must **Build an Evolving World of Discovery and Dread**. In urban fantasy, the setting itself plays one of most important roles, continually evolving and reacting to the PCs' actions. Outwardly, the setting resembles our real world, but it coexists with the fantastical Realms; the Illusion's veneer is thin, at best, and nonexistent, at worst. The PCs traverse these interconnected worlds, discovering intricate politics and rivalries, magical wonders, and horrifying truths. As such, the GM needs to clearly define how the mortal and supernatural worlds interact (see ***Tear Down the Barriers***, p. 237).

Because of the setting's importance, the GM should establish major locations, factions, and NPCs prior to the first session. This helps provide the fiction with an aura of mystery and history. During the first session, the players can then add their personal touches, expanding upon the setting's foundations. In turn, the PCs become established within the setting, rather than existing outside of it.

Example:

The GM and players wish to explore African mythology, as well as the themes of colonialism, economic disparity, xenophobia, and urban blight. They decide to set their campaign in Johannesburg, South Africa, where Archons Binah and Hod wrestle for control of the city's human population. Their struggles have fed the political and racial strife through the City of Gold's history, as well as blind them to the rising power of Nahemoth. Devotees of Chesed are secretly recreating the realm of Nywere in the industrial suburb of City Deep. The PCs must navigate these sinister undercurrents, if they wish to survive in this megacity.

Place the Characters at the Conflict's Heart

Secondly, *Gods and Monsters* narratively shifts away from more revelation-focused stories, i.e., gaining awareness of the True Reality. With the Illusion's collapse, the PCs are aware of the supernatural forces and other worlds surrounding them. Indeed, they may regularly interact with them, existing in the borderlands between Elysium and the True Reality. As such, most stories in this reflection don't solely focus on these horrific revelations.

Instead, urban fantasies revolve around character-driven conflicts and thematic narratives, including mysteries, political intrigues, and romantic entanglements. As such, the GM should *Place the Characters at the Conflict's Heart*, regardless of the overall plot structure. Even though they're stuck between vast and powerful forces, the PCs' individual actions and decisions carry the most narrative weight in the conversation.

Focused conflicts reveal the PCs' personalities, continually testing their beliefs, morality, and resolve. Because of their awareness, the consequences for their actions are more acute and painfully felt. True horror comes from self-discovery and wistfulness, as the PCs recognize the divinity denied them. The supernatural elements are used to frame their struggles by creating narrative contrasts. This adds further narrative depth and contrast.

Example:

A prominent lictor turns up dead prior to an important negotiation. Their mysterious death could reignite conflicts between Kether and Samael, throwing the city into violent chaos. As neutral parties, the PCs are hired to investigate the murder and uncover the responsible party. However, certain factions no longer support peace and seek to undermine the PCs' efforts. As their personal secrets are used against them, the PCs are drawn deeper into the impending conflict.

Let the PCs' Actions Advance the Plot, Regardless of Consequences

Finally, in *Gods and Monsters* stories, immense and powerful entities continually vie for power and dominance over Elysium. Their grand machinations resonate throughout the mundane and supernatural worlds. Their authority and influence are seemingly beyond mortal ken, rife with ancient mysteries and plots that shake the foundation of reality. And yet, the GM should *Let the PCs' Actions Advance the Plot, Regardless of Consequences,* even if they are mere observers to these vast, unknowable conflicts. They are the story's narrative focus, and their actions directly influence how these grand schemes fail or succeed. Their character arcs and subplots continually drive the core fiction, affecting the NPCs and the world itself. In many ways, the PCs are the inciting factor for change, thus, the GM should provide them with agency and investment in the plot.

Example:

Two clans of Children of the Underworld are vying for control of Berlin. Each group seeks to possess an ancient portal between the surface world and Ktonor. This pathway would provide the winner access to their subterranean kin, tipping the balance of power. During the story, the PCs discover the portal and befriend its strange and formidable guardian. This provides them power in the grand scheme, as they can decide its fate – and the fate of Berlin as a whole. The clans turn their attention to the PCs, trying to benefit from their influence.

PRINCIPLES

The *Gods and Monsters* reflection embraces the concepts and themes of dark urban fantasy – an unforgiving world of blurred moralities and living nightmares. The PCs are intimately aware of the malignant forces lurking behind reality's false veneer. The Illusion isn't so much cracked as broken, and the PCs are intimately aware of the supernatural as they witness the pinnacles of Metropolis and depths of Inferno. Each day, they unlock Elysium's mysteries and regain control over their Divinities.

As such, the game's narratives embrace the concepts of magical realism. Stories explore the PCs' importance in the True Reality, as well as their roles in its supernatural affairs. The Higher Powers and their minions recognize the PCs' importance, drawing them into their machinations. Even so, while the awakened characters may sense their lost divinity, they remain shackled by their mortality. The Demiurge's prison still enslaves them, as well as the mythical creatures and ignorant Sleepers around them. The GM can reflect the underlying themes of *Gods and Monsters* by employing the new Principles described below.

Reveal the Living City

In *Gods and Monsters*, the city and its urban environs are vitally important to the narrative. The GM and players should treat it as an NPC, as equally important as any character the PCs encounter. From the urban wastelands to the downtown's neon glow, the city's every corner offers new opportunities and exquisite dangers. ***In Metropolis's Shadow*** discusses this development process in detail (p. 125). The more realistic the city is, the more invested the players will become in protecting their home. Once the city is chosen by the group, the GM and players should use the first session to establish significant locations; at least one location tied to each PC. They may incorporate supernatural qualities into the location, as well.

Example:

In their first session, the GM and the three players chose Detroit as the story's specific city. They agree that the setting should also contain high levels of mythical influences.

The Detective defines the *Painted Lady*, an old bar they live above. The bar's owner, Scarlet, is a Forgotten God of Lost Causes; she's sworn to protect and comfort any patron who crosses the threshold.

The Fixer picks *Chubby Joe's*, a barbecue joint with the city's best pork and collard greens. The large basement once belonged to Detroit's Underground Railroad – but the basement now allows passage to and from the Underworld.

The Academic declares they work at the *Detroit Public Library*, describing their office and coworkers. She's discovered that walking the stacks in the correct order can transport the person to an occult library in Metropolis.

Due to *Gods and Monsters*' focus on mystical realism, the GM also needs to define the city's significant supernatural influences, meshing reality with the mythical. These include the Higher Powers and the city's prevailing borderlands where the Illusion's control remains tenuous. Although Metropolis is ever-present, the GM may wish to incorporate other Realms as well. Also, lesser angels, demons, and monsters all struggle to control Elysium, hiding behind complex rules and restrained by ancient treaties. Conflicts arise from these political tensions, drawing the players deeper into the city's horrific secrets.

As the game progresses, the city continually reveals its secrets and multiple facets, evolving in response to the PCs' actions. This includes major and minor NPCs, who are ingrained into the city's inner workings at different narrative levels. As the PCs involve themselves in this vibrant world, they'll shape the city's future and help reveal new challenges and opportunities. These changes can directly affect the Intrigue Map and become ingrained in the game's fiction.

Example:

In the Detroit campaign, the GM decides the city is embroiled in an intensifying conflict between Yesod and Malkuth. Their lictors and minions have established uneasy territories, fighting to control the city's economic, industrial, and political resources. Their struggles have further weakened the Illusion, allowing Gaia and the Machine City to bleed into the urban landscape. Numerous neighborhoods actually exist inside Metropolis; their denizens incorporate themselves in human communities. Taking advantage of the chaos, Dream Prince Oizys has extended his influence over the local drug culture, attempting to manifest himself in Elysium.

Tear Down the Barriers, yet Establish Clear Boundaries

In *Gods and Monsters*, the mortal and supernatural worlds are intimately connected. However, unlike in standard ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the Illusion no longer entirely separates the realms,, allowing different levels of reality to freely interact. The city's urban landscape is populated with borderlands, where different dimensions and the Realms hold sway. Magic is increasingly prevalent, wielded by Enlightened and Sleepers alike. Gaia dissolves the urban landscape into wild lands, and sets bizarre creatures upon the natural world. Voracious Dream Princes draw slumbering minds into Limbo, enslaving them to their alien wills. The Underworld rises up, eager to claim the sunlit world for its own. Our prison doors have swung open, even if humanity doesn't realize it yet.

Although the Illusion has failed, the GM still needs to establish realistic boundaries when running *Gods and Monsters*. Prior to playing, the GM and players must roughly define how far the paranormal and mundane worlds have integrated. By doing so, the fiction and setting become more concise and structured, and, thus, more believable. Without established boundaries, the mythology and narrative can become convoluted and unbalanced, detracting from gameplay

There are several various factors to consider. How does magic work – e.g., ritual, training, or natural ability? How prevalent are the Higher Powers and their minions? How much of Metropolis and Inferno have been revealed? Are portals more common and easily opened? As the Illusion collapses, how have the jailers continued to maintain humanity's ignorance? What entities do the human/inhuman cults serve and how much of the truth do they know? Has the mundane world recognized the supernatural threats? If so, what actions have they taken? These and other questions can be discussed during the first session, while the collective answers establish the core fiction.

Example:

The game group decides their city and the Underworld have merged together. Interactions between humanity and the Children of the Underworld are frequent and well established. Currently, an uneasy truce exists between the surface and Underworld, enforced by agencies on both sides. Powerful lictors cooperate with the elders of Ktonor to maintain some remnant of the Illusion, even as they indulge in petty rivalries and power plays. Unscrupulous humans and Children run black markets and illegal trade between worlds. Meanwhile, alien entities in the Fallen Realms have awakened from their eternal slumber, eager to drag both worlds into oblivion.

Give the City Many Faces

In *Gods and Monsters*, the city and its inhabitants have several faces; i.e., their public and private personas, as well as their mundane and supernatural miens. The GM needs to account for each of these, defining the city's many emotional layers and hidden motivations. In doing so, they provide the city and major NPCs with compelling personalities for the PCs to discover, keeping the setting fresh and vibrant. They can use this to narratively set the stage for future storylines and hint at mysteries to be unlocked. As the players sense the city's hidden facets, they'll instinctively ask questions and seek answers. The GM can expand upon these narrative threads in session or during downtime. Yet, like an iceberg, the city's true nature lies forever beneath the dark waves, unseen and waiting.

Example:

The corner store owner, Hector, has become an accepted constant in the PCs' lives. Always attentive and courteous, Hector constantly has the exact connections and/or information the PCs need. Outwardly mundane, Hector is actually the incarnation of the neighborhood's spirit. He's long since forgotten this, believing himself to be human. As the campaign progresses, outside forces infringe on the neighborhood, inflicting harm upon him. He physically and emotionally suffers from the turmoil.

Retell Myths in Modern Terms

In urban fantasy, classical myths and stories mesh with our current world, redefining themselves in this modern age. Humanity's dreams and nightmares are reality, living amongst us, and striving to fulfill their own desires and wishes. Real magic hums beneath the bricks and mortar, ready to be unleashed and harnessed. Urban legends are born from reality, not products of whimsy and childhood stories. In *Gods and Monsters*, there is horrifying truth in every fantastical belief, and monsters really do wait in the shadows. The GM is encouraged to reinvent common mythologies, and populate their city with magic, miracles, and monsters.

Yet, these stories should remain rooted within the game's core setting, where legends are actually twisted reflections of the *KULT* mythos. Although the sword Excalibur is real, it was empowered by the Archon Chokmah – trying to subdue humanity's chaotic nature. Nosferatu and Borderliners stand in for vampires and werewolves, while the faerie folk are actually creatures of passion. With a little creativity, the GM can create an entirely new urban fantasy setting, and populate it with familiar, yet unique, creatures and wonders.

Example:

The PCs frequently travel to the Goblin Market behind Janis Street Bridge. Considered neutral territory by the city's supernatural inhabitants, the labyrinthine bazaar defies time and space, connecting with multiple dimensions. The 'Goblins' were once a servitor race from Metropolis, freed upon humanity's imprisonment. They now pledge loyalty to the Auctioneer, an Elysium God that rarely reveals itself publicly.

Show Echoes of the Past

The world of *Gods and Monsters* is one of dark legends and horrific allegories. The crumbling Illusion allows humanity's true memories to filter through the cracks, revealing clues and remnants of our lost divinity. In fulfilling the Agenda, *Place the Characters at the Conflict's Heart*, the GM should allow the city to reflect the PCs' divine souls. They should remain intimately entwined with the city's beating heart, even if they never understand how or why.

The PCs need only listen to the city's song to hear their former names. Their personal mythologies are graffitied onto the subway walls by unknown hands. Their fractured dreams cower in cardboard boxes beneath rusted railway trestles. Their forgotten sins lurk in abandoned apartments, hateful and hungry. Their souls echo in the city still, waiting to be rediscovered, if only they have the courage to look.

Example:

Throughout the story, **The Ronin** is approached by homeless people of all types. They behave with quiet reverence, falling at their feet, or trying to touch their face. Many leave strange offerings, such as pieces of colored glass, moldy food, old subway tokens, and makeshift holy symbols. As time goes on, they gather outside the PC's home, prostrating themselves in silent prayer.

THE FICTION

In *Gods and Monsters* stories, the fiction revolves around core themes: the *Magic*, the *Mystery*, and the *Passions*. From these three tenets, the GM and players can expand the various narrative elements and threats, such as the city, NPCs, and events, to best reflect the concepts of urban fantasy. All the standard ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** character Archetypes can be employed in this reflection, as well as the four Enlightened Archetypes (with the GM's permission).

Firstly, the **Magic** refers to the paranormal elements within the setting, which can both include and expand upon the standard *KULT* mythos. As discussed above, the magical and mundane coexist, continually influencing the PCs' lives. They're forced to maintain lives in both worlds, and adhere to the rules of both. The GM should continually infuse the fantastical and horrific into their daily existence.

Secondly, the **Mystery** refers to the unseen world and hidden motivations that guide the narrative. Typically, urban fantasies adhere to noir aesthetics and tropes, presenting their worlds in shades of grey and shadow. In this hidden world, secrets are currency, fueling the never-ending struggles that drive the city. From Gods to garbage men, everyone has intriguing stories to tell and unspoken sins to hide – all waiting for the players to discover.

Finally, the **Passions** refer to the underlying desires and motivations influencing the world. In urban fantasy, these passions are usually distinct and intense, pushing the PCs and NPCs alike to extreme lengths. Forbidden loves, exquisite hates, and unrivaled greeds twist fragile hearts beyond their breaking point. Frequently, men and monsters act without logic, lost in their sensual hungers, succumbing to their countless vices. The world of *Gods and Monsters* is sexy and savage, wreathed in sex, smoke, and cheap booze.

Threats

Events	Places	Characters
See *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46 **Kidnapped by Unseelie** (Liberate/Abuse) **Murdered Politician** (Mystery/Fear) **Messages from the Past** (Revelation/Allure) **Target of Political Power Grab** (Rivalry/Victory) **Dangerous Relationship** (Romance/Conformity) **Missing Magical Item** (Search/Discord) **Opportunity to Get Back at Rival** (Temptation/Vengeance) **Magical Curse** (Transmutation/Exclusion)	Gateways between realms, Gaia Woodland, Borderland, Goblin Market, Abandoned Subway, Bus Terminal, High-Rise, Slums, Apartment Complex, Apartment (squatters), Cop Bar, Local Pub, Coffee Shop, Book Store, Clinic, Clinic (Illegal), Occult Shop, Fortuneteller, Pawnshop, Nosferatu Club, Jackal Den, Parking Garage, Art Gallery, All-Night Gym, Penthouse Condo, Library (Public), Library (University), Street-Food Vendor, Underworld-Controlled Club, Private Club, Brothel, Strip Club, Convenience Store, Athletics Center, Steam Tunnels, Police Station	Magician (Death, Dream, Madness, Passion, Time and Space), Cop, Criminal, Cultist, Insane Prophet, Houseless Person, Civil Servant, Businessman, Journalist, Occult Store Owner, Bartender, Street Musician, Beggar, Newspaper Vendor, Store Owner, Nurse, Cab Driver, Food Vendor, Sex Worker, Hustler, Mechanic, City Worker, Barista, Jazz Club Owner, Drug Dealer, Petty Thug, Subway Attendant, Bike/Foot Messenger, Urban Explorer, Private Detective, Madame, Stripper, Innocent, Street Preacher

Groups	Monsters	Objects
Street Gang, Corporation, Law Enforcement, Elite Club, Magical Group, Jackals, Hackers Club, Corrupt Cops, Rich Family, Occultists, Sex Workers, Mobsters, Street People, Refined Cultists, Charity Workers, Neighborhood Watch, Vigilantes, Professional Crew, Veterans, Union Workers, City Workers, Social Club, Crazed Worshippers, Militant Activists	Children of the Night, Children of the Underworld, Gargoyles, Wolven, Faeries, Vampires, Werewolves, Ghosts, Lictors, Angel, Demons, Razides, Elysium God, Forgotten God, Forsaken Spirits, Nepharites, Incarnates, Azghouls, Chronities, Eldermensch	Guns, Drugs, Magical Artifacts, Ritual Items, Cigarettes, Booze, Knives, Cars, Computers, Evidence, Money, Stolen Goods, Tattoos, Trench Coat, Calling Card, Graffiti, Handcuffs, Improvised Weapon

Variants

We are the Shadows: This reflection focuses on intrigue and danger, where the PCs are the Enlightened (*KDL*, p. 351). They are directly involved in the city's supernatural affairs, working to overthrow the main power brokers. The narrative focuses on them gaining influence and political clout within this secret world, while also avoiding exposing their activities to the ever-vigilant jailers.

Living Under the Shadow: One of the Higher Powers has broken through the Illusion and now rules over the city. Their Principle dominates most of the human inhabitants, continually influencing their daily lives. The PCs rebel against the status quo, striving to cast off this imposed tyranny of the mind. They work with similarly-minded factions, moving through the city's shadows, trying to stay one step ahead of their oppressor's minions.

CHAPTER 12

DARKNESS AND DECAY

GHOSTS LINED THE DARKENED HALL, SILENT SENTINELS ALL. KIMBERLY STARED and they stared back, their faces mockeries of her own. She'd only wanted to escape the pounding rhythms of the nightclub. Yet, through the curtained doorway, she'd somehow found herself here. A funhouse nightmare of mirrors. Whorls of nauseating colors painted the floor and ceiling, filling her with queasy vertigo. Scarlet light glistened, as if bathing her reflections in blood.

She turned around, only to find another mirrored image smiling at her. But Kimberly sure as shit wasn't smiling. She touched the mirror; the reflection mimicking her, but never losing that grotesque grin. Kimberly pushed away, repulsed. When she looked down the hall this time, she realized she wasn't alone. A woman stood in the distance, haloed in the hall's scarlet shadows. Her face remained hidden behind a ceramic wolf's mask, framed by long, red hair.

"Who are you?" Kimberly said, trying to retreat. "Who are you?" the figure replied, perfectly mimicking her voice. She felt the mirror against her back, "Please, I just want to go home." The woman pulled the mask away, revealing the face beneath, "But you are home."

OVERVIEW

Darkness and Decay stories empathize the Uncanny rather than focusing on the more overt horrors inherent within ***KULT: Divinity Lost***. Also known as the *unheimlich*, this narrative aesthetic subtly twists our world until the commonplace becomes unfamiliar, instilling us with creeping dread and repulsion. The uncanny reveals that which frightens and unsettles us, inspiring dread, yet can rarely be described – it is simply known. Focusing more on psychological horror and the mundane world, *Darkness and Decay* stories relegate the supernatural to the background, only alluding to its existence. Even when the Illusion frays, the narrative remains mysterious and eerie rather than overtly horrifying. Indeed, uncanny narratives inspire dread not through supernatural threats, but the benign world reflecting our hidden anxieties.

AGENDA

At its core, the uncanny infuses the familiar with fear and strangeness, forever blurring the lines between reality and unreality. In *Darkness and Decay*, the PCs are continually exposed to the Illusion's wrongness – sensing the horrors lurking beneath the surface. Nowhere in their world is safe, not their personal lives, their friends and family, or even themselves. Yet, no matter how deep they dig, no matter what they learn, the PCs continually fumble in the darkness, ignorant to the truth. This splinter in their mind itches incessantly, driving them mad with its continual presence. Yet, the knowledge they gain remains ambiguous, rife with mystery, and generating more questions than answers.

In short, *Darkness and Decay* narratives walk the razor's edge between what is familiar and alien, substance and shadow. As such, the reflection is perfectly suited for the *Sleeper* Archetype, as the PCs remain blessedly unaware of the unnatural forces consuming the world around them. Unlike most ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** campaigns, this reflection rarely, if ever, reveals reality and its terrors. Instead, fear comes from never knowing what is true, even about oneself. Even when the Illusion shatters, ambiguity continues shrouding the truth, keeping its secrets hidden behind familiar masks. The uncanny world of *Darkness and Decay* is one of long shadows and uncertainty, where enlightenment offers only disquiet. The Agendas for this reflection are as follows:

- Hint at the Illusion, but Obscure the True Reality.
- Keep the PCs on Edge, But Offer Moments of Introspection.
- The PCs' actions Have Impact, Even If They Don't Understand How.

Hint at the Illusion, but Obscure the True Reality

To effectively reflect the uncanny, the GM needs to ***Hint at the Illusion, but Obscure the True Reality***. Although the Illusion is crumbling, even the mundane world remains cloaked in mystery and metaphor, perpetually inspiring doubt and uncertainty. What lurks beyond the Illusion is as mysterious as it is horrifying, confounding the troubled mind. Like a funhouse mirror, the uncanny reflects and distorts the truth; what is seen cannot be trusted.

Even after the story resolves itself, the PCs shouldn't fully understand what they've experienced. The narrative's secrets and revelations remain equally intangible and contentious, while the motivations of human NPCs and monsters can be viewed through multiple interpretations. Finally, the Realms and Higher Powers are vague, symbolic concepts rather than physical manifestations to be encountered. Even when they're exposed, their existences are wreathed in metaphor and mystery, existing beyond human comprehension.

However, the GM shouldn't be obtuse simply to confuse or frustrate the players. The uncanny and its nightmarish logic are meant to inspire contemplation and introspection, not be impenetrably mystifying. Familiarity resonates throughout the uncanny. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, that awareness still reminds us of what has been lost, even if we never comprehend its meaning.

Example:

The Doll suffers recurring **Nightmares** of faceless people seeking to steal his visage. As the story progresses, he catches glimpses of figures with ragged holes where their faces should be. Yet, no matter how fast the PC looks, the figures have already disappeared. Narratively, these entities are fragments of the PC's former lives. Thematically, they represent the PC's desperate search for relevance. It's unlikely the PC will ever discover this.

Keep the PCs on Edge, But Offer Moments of Introspection

In *Darkness and Decay*, the uncanny infects the PCs' daily existence, altering their world in unsettling and unfamiliar ways. Although these encounters are predominantly benign in nature, the PCs should continually question their experiences and perceptions. The settings possess an eerie dream logic to them, twisting in unexpected ways. As the story progresses, the players should feel like they're walking on sand, which can give way beneath them at any given moment, and for no apparent reason.

Yet, in turn, the PCs should be allowed moments to collect their thoughts and assess what they've witnessed. In many ways, uncanny narratives are mysteries wrapped in enigmas; their symbols and themes possess true meaning and significance, no matter how confusing or obscure. As such, the GM should ***Keep the PCs on Edge, But Offer Moments of Introspection***. By allowing the PCs these brief moments of certainty and reflection, the players can renew their mental footing. However, in truth, these introspections are merely opportunities for the GM to redefine the narrative reality once more, if necessary. Every answer should inspire more questions, dragging the PCs deeper into the darkness.

Example:

The Veteran believes he is **Haunted** by a vengeful spirit. As the entity continually disrupts his life, he seeks answers to its existence and origins. The evidence he collects points toward wartime atrocities by former colleagues. After some introspection, he decides to seek out the perpetrators, calling in favors to locate them. In truth, the GM knows *The Veteran* is the mass murderer, and the 'angry spirit' is the manifestation of his guilty conscience. Every new act of vengeance only feeds his self-destruction.

The PCs' Actions Have Impact, Even If They Don't Understand How

Darkness and Decay stories are highly personalized, shifting the focus from the overt horrors toward the PCs and their experiences. Their actions should resonate throughout the world, causing ripples of circumstance. Furthermore, each PC's actions directly impact the conversation, rebounding back on them. In many cases, their brief encounters with the unnatural reveal their own failings and weaknesses, rather than directly resolving some greater evil.

This Agenda also plays heavily into reactions, as the PCs affect other lives, inspiring them to action as well. However, the grander scope of their actions remains obscured by the Illusion. When the Higher Powers respond, it is through their emissaries and reflections in Elysium. The players may never recognize these changing currents, only sense the unnatural changes they cause. Yet, even when they feel confused or completely out of control, the players should feel they're advancing the plot and revealing the mystery, piece by piece. What those pieces mean may never be completely revealed, but they've taken their first steps into a larger world. As such, the GM should frame the narratives so that *The PCs' actions Have Impact, Even If They Don't Understand How.*

Example:

The PC learns unsettling truths about his partner and the city he has sworn to protect. Yet, each revelation he acquires only exposes fresh horrors and new mysteries. The more he wade in the filth, the more his own desires are warped – exposing ugliness lurking inside him.

PRINCIPLES

As *Darkness and Decay* stories shift away from involving overt horrors, such as the Higher Powers and their minions, inspiring true fear may appear initially daunting for GMs. For the most part, the Illusion remains intact, holding its gruesome secrets to itself. Monsters become metaphor and mystery, rarely seen in their full glory. Even so, uncanny narratives can still provide true shocks and soul-rending fear. Their focus on ambiguity and existential dread offers different opportunities to develop horrifying – and potentially more impactful – roleplaying experiences. The following Principles offer GMs the narrative framework for promoting the uncanny in the conversation and fiction.

Insinuate the Uncanny, but Obscure the Truth

Despite the Illusion's relative strength, the Elysium of *Darkness and Decay* remains wreathed in mysteries and unknowable secrets. While its supernatural elements do exist, they remain inscrutable, murky, and beyond our comprehension. The Higher Powers and the machinations typically associated with ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** stories are rare, if nonexistent. Indeed, their overt natures are counterproductive when exploring uncanny themes. Even when they reveal themselves, our beliefs and concepts of reality are surmounted by new doubts and suspicions. Logic and truth should elude the PCs, unsettling them further, as only their personal fears and beliefs can fill the void.

Example:

The Fixer's Contact requests meeting him under the North Street bridge at 3:33 a.m., and to bring metallic-blue spray paint. Once there, he must mark the third pillar with an arrow pointing down. If he do so, the bridge lights falter and die, casting him into inky darkness. Almost immediately, the lights flicker back to life, revealing a package wrapped in blue velvet at the PC's feet.

In *Darkness and Decay*, the subconscious world holds true dominion over all things, including the PCs. When making her Moves, the GM should utilize the fiction to obscure their true meaning. This adds an uncommon weirdness to the world, shifting it away from normalcy. Events can defy rhyme or reason, embracing dream logic and ignoring the laws of Time and Space. Creatures and NPCs encountered are equally mysterious and unnerving, acting as if they exist outside normal reality and without clear motivations. The PCs closest intimates can become strangers wearing familiar masks, while ghosts and monsters expose the PC's repressed desires and traumas.

Example:

The PCs encounter a madwoman cloaked in raven's wings. She talks in fractured prophecies, knows intimate details about their lives, and offers them help for no apparent reason. If they accept her initial advice, the PCs continually find raven's feathers placed in bizarre and unsettling locations – between books pages, under their napkin, on the car's front seat, and even under their pillows.

Dread Over Horror

The uncanny relies heavily on perpetuating ambiguity while feeding the players' suspicions through corrupted normalcy. The PCs are not assailed by the monstrous, but rather disquieted by existential threats and macabre secrets. Every aspect of the PCs' lives, such as people, places, and possessions, exude an inherent *wrongness*, adding to their deepening dread. In time, they're forced to realize their personal convictions are based on lies and misinformation. Fear comes from the distortion of the familiar. The world exists to reflect their anxieties and reveal their hidden truths.

Example:

The Careerist is summoned by their new director. Upon arriving on the designated floor, they find an open space with a single, red door at its center. A man sits behind an ornate, but bare desk. The man moves in broken, stuttering gestures; his voice a hollow monotone. It's as if he's desperately trying to be human, but forgotten how. He pauses, cocking his head like a dog hearing something. Then he gestures to the red door. "The director will see you now."

Despite their ambiguity, uncanny narratives can be shockingly brutal and violent. However, these gruesome aspects typically focus on distortions of the human form. Deformity, mutilation, and disfigurations are frequent themes, as they destroy and pervert the sanctity of flesh. Furthermore, this reflection reveals humanity's inhumanity exposing our darkest deeds and the depths of our depravity. People commit acts of rapacious violence without conscience or reason, reminding us how tenuous our existence is – and how close to monsters we truly are. The uncanny reflects the horrors within us all.

Example:

The Detective becomes obsessed after discovering a human tongue; the only thing left in the missing partner's otherwise empty apartment. As they investigate, they begin encountering mute people, each with mangled and missing tongues. Then people also lacking ears and eyes appear constantly. Or is the PC only noticing them for the first time? At one point, an NPC they're questioning whispers to the sky, "Speak no evil," and tries ripping out their own tongue.

Obscure Where Humanity Begins and Ends

A core precept of *Darkness and Decay* is the distortion of humanity. Our innate fear decreases when encountering something that appears either clearly human or inhuman. However, our psychological discomfort increases as human and inhuman traits merge together, obscuring the subject's true nature. Similarly, the GM can inspire this instinctual dread through a) revealing humanity where it *should not* be, and b) obscuring humanity where it *should be*.

The human mind naturally seeks to recognize familiar patterns and shapes in the natural and manmade world. The GM can play upon this by imbuing inanimate objects with human qualities, such as facial features and humanoid forms. In contrast, the GM can make people appear alien and unreal by distorting or removing recognizable traits, such as eyes, mouths, and limbs. However, they must balance these two factors, as adding too little or removing too much makes the subject monstrous, thus ruining the uncanny effect. Simply allow the players to fill in the missing pieces with their own fears.

Examples:

The PC glances down the hallway, weakly lit by an emergency exit sign. Between the fluorescent flashes, a human-shaped hole appears in the darkness, as if someone is standing there. But the light is so inconstant, it may be simply a trick of his eyes.

The gas station attendant stares through the main window. The grimy glass muddies his features, as if the flesh is drooping off his skull. Tiny, piggish eyes glisten, never breaking the PC's gaze, as his bloated fingers slowly beckon them inside.

Reveal Our Darkest Reflections

Another common uncanny theme is *reflections*. This narrative concept explores the darkness lurking inside us by exposing our hidden natures, repressed desires, and the grotesqueries we are capable of. These can be represented through inanimate objects and imagery, such as mirrored surfaces, childish drawings, and distorted paintings. However, more often, our reflection is represented through people and creatures, such as the doppelgänger or the Jungian shadow.

When developing NPCs and creatures, the GM should subtly reflect the PCs in their motivations and personalities. Use them to expose the PCs'

Dark Secrets and Disadvantages, serving as living reminders of their imperfections and weaknesses. They may also reveal the PCs' darker desires by indulging in the forbidden and fantastical, tempting them to surrender their doubts and morality. The GM can also include divergent relationships, so the PC's Relation contrasts their personality, testing their personal nature.

Example:

The Seeker encounters an online avatar that mimics his appearance, but acts in contrast to his personality. Where the PC is fearful, quiet, and submissive, the avatar is brash, brutal, and violent. However, these destructive attitudes serves him well, gaining him power and pleasures the PC could only dream of. Soon, the doppelgänger commits acts that *The Seeker* only wishes he could do, including murdering his former tormentor.

Subvert the Familiar, Corrupt the Safe

In *Darkness and Decay*, the Realm of Madness holds dominance over Elysium, seeping into our waking minds like an infection. Bizarre and dreamlike moments intrude on the PCs' daily lives, igniting sublime passions. At night, Limbo intrudes upon humanity's slumber, weaving its threads into our subconscious. These unsettling elements corrupt the PCs' perceptions until they can no longer truly know where reality ends and dreams begin. Similarly, the players themselves should feel equally disquieted, questioning the validity of their experiences.

Although the world may appear logical and familiar, the uncanny frequently permeates its façade, forcing the PCs to question aspects of their reality. By infusing the fiction with ambiguity and doubt, the GM elicits fear and paranoia in the characters. Odd, minute details test the PCs' perceptions and inspire fear in normalcy. Yet, any of the instances can be dismissed as tricks of memory or mere coincidence. The GM can tweak and fray the edges of their reality until things completely unravel.

Examples:

Someone else's voice emerges from their lover's mouth. People they've known forever no longer recognize them. Their car door is unlocked, even though they're sure they locked it. Their home appears perfectly normal, except the trim has been painted a different color. Their neighbor's curtain creeps open, revealing someone they do not know staring back at them. When they glance at the clock, hours have passed and they don't recall anything in-between.

THE FICTION

In *Darkness and Decay*, the uncanny replaces the familiar with the strange, weird, and repulsive. The GM and players can utilize the fiction to capture this unnerving surrealism, adding dreamlike and disturbing imagery, and inviting questions and physiological terrors. When presenting threats and narrative elements within the stories, the GM should explore the following themes:

- **Is it alive**? Embrace the uncanny valley, and blur the line separating being alive and lifeless. What is human and what is inanimate? What possesses sentience and what is artificial? And, most importantly, what possesses a soul?
- **Is this a Dream**? Dreams and nightmares weave heavily into uncanny narratives. They appear randomly and are laced with metaphors, interactions, and revelations that distort the distinction between reality and the subconscious.
- **Am I the Real One**? Which is real – ourselves or our reflection? Are we the false image or the truth? This is the realm of doubles and doppelgängers, where even our personal identity is uncertain.
- **Who Are You**? What defines us as 'Us'? Are we shaped by our experiences and memories? If so, how can we be certain when our memories are clouded by self-delusions and personal lies? Is the sense of déjà vu merely coincidence or fragments from your actual memory?
- **Is This Reality**? The surreal and dreamlike nature of the uncanny pervades the mind and perception, distorting reality. The GM can utilize the human desire to place familiar patterns over unfamiliar things, obscuring and subverting what is real and unreal.

Threats

Events	Places	Characters
See *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46 **Buried alive** (Liberate/Fear) **Strange Attraction** (Romance/Compulsion) **Meeting Double** (Mystery/Awakening) **Stalked by Unseen Force** (Hunted/Torment) **Become Your Dreamself** (Transmutation/Allure) **Drawn to Underworld** (Revelation/Safety) **Recover Stolen Memories** (Search/Vengeance)	Art Deco Coffee Shop, Empty Highway, Old Tenement Building, Factory, Suburbia, Doctor's Office, Strip Mall, Movie Theater, Old House, Abandoned Lot, Parking Garage, Overgrown Park, Carnival, Library, Post-Modern University, Railway Bridge, Subway, Boardwalk, Woodlands, Foreclosed Farm, Smoke Shop, Mirrored Hall, Sex Club, Impromptu Rave, Farmer's Field	Possessed Lover, Philosophical Barista, Failed Actress, Weary Detective, Struggling Artist, Discreet Chauffeur, Decrepit Voyager, Player Character's Dreamself, Suave Fixer, Delinquent Teenager, Nostalgic Musician, Malformed Showgirl, Transvestite, Bartender in Drag, Unstable Dilettante, Tour Guide, Avant-Garde Photographer, Deviant Bounty-Hunter, Harlequin

Groups	Monsters	Objects
Cannibalistic Nouveau Riche, Drugged-Out Gangsters, Nihilistic Groupies, Envious Impersonators, Aloof Artists, Actors' Guild, Crazed Street People, Murderous Rural Folk, Inbred Family, Death Cult, Fanatical Worshipers, Urban Explorers, Amateur Astronomers, Recovering Users, Obsessive Fans	Ghosts, Doppelgänger, Mechanical Double, Twisted Reflections, Possessed Doll, Elegant Demons, Children of the Underworld, Phantoms, Fallen Angels, Shadow People, Malformed Creature, Devolved Human, Living Image, Living Corpse, Unseelie Fae, Alien Hybrid, Chimera, Invisible Person, Wendigo	Severed Body Parts, Identical Items, Mannequins, Statues, Mirrors, Notebooks, Unsettling art, Videotapes, Colorful Bottles, Musical Items, Exotic Clothing, Antique Gun, Darkened Limousine, Drug Paraphernalia, Typewriter, Colored Keys, Porcelain Mask, Leather Mask, Grotesque Art, Bizarre Sculpture, Doorknob, Dust Cover, Movie Makeup Kit

Variants

Small Town Secrets: The PCs live in a secluded community of eclectic souls and strange personalities. An unexpected event disrupts the town's relative peace, revealing the ugly secrets lurking beneath its veneer. As circumstances spiral out of control, the PCs find themselves entwined within the uncanny tendrils rising to the surface. The more they peel back the town's mask, the more hideous its truths become. And the more ugliness they learn about themselves.

A City Divided: The PCs' city slips through the Illusion's boundaries, interacting with its doppelgänger. Time and Space warp and merge, as elements of these parallel worlds bleed into one another. The Cities – and their inhabitants – are twisted reflections of each other. Both are hauntingly familiar, yet terrifyingly strange. As the story progresses, the PCs must find some way of surviving this cosmic entanglement, as only one city can endure – and neither wishes to fade from existence.

Elysium Gothic: The PC's world has become one of metaphor and mystery; a modernized faerie tale. Drawing upon the aesthetics and themes of gothic horror, the stories are more allegory than fact, blurring the lines of realism and fantasy. Somewhere between wonder and terror, the PCs explore the sublime realms of flesh and passion, death and dreams. Between shadow and light, they'll discover fearful enlightenment and perverse pleasures – whether they wish to or not.

CHAPTER 13

ILLUSIONS AND SORROWS

YE-JUN STAGGERED INTO HIS TENEMENT'S LOBBY. HE MADE HIS WAY to the elevator, head swaying heavily, weighed down by exhaustion and drink. He'd intended to return home hours ago, but his friends had effectively taken over an entire pojangmacha. Now, his stomach churned with spices and alcohol. When the elevator opened, Ye-jun stepped inside without thinking.

He didn't see her, at first. Tall and exotic, the silver-haired woman smiled at him. Not a tenant, he knew. He'd have remembered someone this gorgeous. She waited patiently, watching him with amethyst eyes. Nervously, he pressed the button for his floor. As the doors closed, she stepped forward and pressed the floor before his. They rode in silence; Ye-jun sobered by her alluring presence. Upon reaching her floor, she stepped out into the darkened hall. She turned and smiled again. Her perfect mouth stretched wider, tearing, ripping, blood flowing over rows of needled teeth. "I'm going to kill you on the next floor, Ye-jun," she said.

The doors shut with a cruel finality, the elevator resuming its ascent. Ye-jun could only wait for them to open again. Knowing that she'd be there. Waiting.

OVERVIEW

The **Illusions and Sorrows** reflection explores the precepts of Asian horror, exploring the sort of stories told in China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand. Although highly diverse in their themes and cultural aesthetics, these narrative styles share common threads, including their heavy reliance on magical realism. In each case, these stories blur the lines between our world and the spiritual realm through harsh contrasts. They accentuate eerie atmospheres, inspire dread and tension, and rely on psychological fears over the shocks and scares more prevalent in Western horror traditions. Steeped in theme and morality, *Illusions and Sorrows* takes ***KULT: Divinity Lost's*** personalized horror to more intimate levels, where the monsters frequently serve as cultural and sociopolitical commentary (see ***Monsters as Metaphor***, p. 144). Also, Asian horror frequently utilizes the action-reaction narrative structure and character-centric stories, which meshes well with the conversation format.

AGENDA

From creepy ghost stories to hyper-violent thrillers, Asian horror has greatly influenced Western storytellers for the last decade. However, while appealing to Western audiences, effectively presenting this complex style of horror can be daunting. *Illusions and Sorrows* attempts to help GMs recreate the cultural and narrative concepts most prevalent in pan-Asian storytelling. Fortunately, ***KULT: Divinity Lost's*** underlying approach to roleplaying aligns well with this style of horror. The following adjusted Agendas can help guide the GM in reflecting the distinct narrative differences between Eastern and Western horror.

- Display the Spiritual World, but Obscure the True Reality.
- Keep the PCs Unsettled, and Taint Their Moments of Respite.
- Establish Causality, as the PCs' Actions Have Direct Consequences.

Display the Spiritual World, but Obscure the True Reality

An integral aspect of *Illusions and Sorrows* is narratively reflecting the deep cultural connection of humanity to the supernatural world. Ancestral spirits, malevolent ghosts, and temperamental gods are recognizable aspects of the mundane world, even in modern times. Whereas Western horror narratives spend time overcoming the characters' inherent disbelief in the paranormal, Eastern horror characters generally accept paranormal entities and events as entirely plausible. Indeed, the PCs' daily lives should be infused with their spiritualism and cultural traditions. In turn, this inherent awareness allows the supernatural world to influence their perceptions, be it consciously or unconsciously.

However, in ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the Illusion still holds sway over humanity, dulling our senses to the supernatural realms. It remains an ever-present barrier between Elysium and reality, obscuring universal truths from us. As such, the GM needs to **Display the Spiritual World, but Obscure the True Reality**. In essence, the cultural and spiritual elements influence the PCs' daily lives, but they are still based on false perceptions. As the story progresses, the GM slowly incorporates elements of the ***KULT*** mythos into these accepted philosophies. So, as the PCs strip back the Illusion, they recognize their beliefs were inherently flawed, and their nightmarish world is revealed to be infinitely worse. By meshing these two narrative concepts together, the stories gain greater depth and more horrific importance.

The Descendant knows they carry the spiritual burden of their ancestor's sins (***Haunted***). Each year, they must attend a mysterious festival in their hometown to offer gifts of incense smoke, hoping to feed any starving and tormented spirits. They're unaware that the ancestor is desperately trying to escape Inferno. In truth, this ritual is meant to slowly exchange *The Descendant's* soul with that of the ancestral purgatide, and is part of an endless cycle.

Keep the PCs Unsettled, and Taint Their Moments of Respite

Another integral aspect of *Illusions and Sorrows* is the uncanny nature of Asian horror. As with existential horror, the universe's laws are alien and indifferent, long forgotten by humanity. Breaking these laws invites disaster upon the violator, even when done out of ignorance. Random acts of fate can condemn the unwary to terrifying ends. Characters do not seek to actively overcome the threat, but simply persevere and survive its effect upon them. This effectively removes the personally adversarial aspects more common in Western horror narratives.

This sense of helplessness and impending doom resonates throughout Eastern horror narratives, weighing upon the PCs continually. As such, the GM should **Keep the PCs Unsettled, and Taint Their Moments of Respite**. In effect, once they've attracted the universe's attention, they are irrevocably condemned. Their dark fate cannot be escaped, only endured. Even when they're at rest, the PCs should be reminded of what horrors await them, sullying their moments of peace and reflection. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, this Agenda also helps reflect the PCs' separation from the mundane world, intensifying their existential dread. Even if they survive, the terrors remain, waiting to return again.

The Seeker has been investigating an online death cult, which they know is responsible for numerous suicides. After discovering the group possesses its victims through the Internet, they purposefully disconnect their desktop and phone. However, moments after leaving the computer room, the monitor's familiar glow flickers back to life. They hear *something* dragging itself through the room, inching closer.

Establish Causality, as the PCs' Actions Have Direct Consequences

Illusions and Sorrows narratives rely heavily on existential dread and its themes, incorporating them into many of these stories. Due to the systemic nature of Asian horror, its protagonists are frequently inadvertent victims of the supernatural forces around them. They are condemned by their actions, even if they are unaware of the potential consequences. They cannot undo their mistake, only suffer for it. The PCs are not meant to defeat the antagonist or slay the monster, but to survive and potentially learn from their harrowing experience.

More importantly, Eastern horror stories frequently deviate from the goal-oriented stories more prevalent in Western horror. Instead, they progress through causality, where the character's actions incite reactions and drive the story toward some thematic conclusion. Furthermore, this conclusion does not necessarily provide clear resolutions – another deviation from Western Horror. As such, the GM should ***Establish Causality*, *as the PCs' Actions Have Direct Consequences***.

Fortunately, the conversation's freeform structure and collaborative nature work well in fulfilling this Agenda. Rather than seeking to complete specific story goals, *Illusion and Sorrows* narratives focus on the PCs themselves, exploring their personal experiences, growths, and transformations. As the story progresses, their actions trigger narrative responses, defining how the story proceeds. Although they may never understand how their actions have influenced the story, the PCs must endure the resulting consequences. Upon the story's resolution, the PCs (and players) should have discovered meaning from their struggle, even if it ends in futility.

After reading their companion's journal (action), the PCs are cursed by a vengeful *penanggal* (reaction). If they do not escape this curse, they'll be slaughtered and their souls enslaved by the malevolent entity. As the story progresses, the PCs discover clues pointing to the origins of this curse (action), exposing cannibalism and demonic worship by village elders (reaction). Eventually, they learn how to survive the curse (action), but doing so condemns the villagers – both guilty and innocent – to the penanggal cruel embrace (reaction). The story is resolved, even though the penanggal remains undefeated; the PCs are simply left with the consequences of their choices.

PRINCIPLES

As discussed above, Eastern horror differs from traditional Western horror in several regards. Its influences rely heavily upon East Asian cultural beliefs and philosophical concepts, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, and Taoism. These aspects can create both subtle and significant narrative differences in how stories are told. While an in-depth discussion of these intricate cultural and societal systems is beyond the scope of this supplement, the GM can draw upon the following Principles to create effective *Illusion and Sorrows* campaigns. Generally, these relational themes resonate throughout most Eastern horror narratives.

Inspire Fear Through Other Emotions

Horror is an emotion, elicited by threats – real or perceived – to our mental and physical well-being. As such, Eastern horror stories revolve around characters confronting conceptual and tangible threats, such as death, illness, isolation, and madness. *Illusions and Sorrows* narratives focus on how the PCs confront extreme and unresolved emotions, their own and those of others around them. These uncontrolled strong emotions twist the heart and soul, causing people to act impulsively. Love and lust blind us, perverting our motives and tainting our hearts. Rage and paranoia drive us to acts of violence. Sorrow and insecurities consume us, robbing us of our faith and will. Excessive emotions obliterate our identities, and we are powerless against others lost to their passions. This helplessness, in turn, inspires true fear.

In *KULT: Divinity Lost* many emotions are directly connected to the Higher Powers and their Principles, as well as of Dreams, Madness, and Passion. In turn, these narratives can become cautionary tales, revealing the terrors awaiting us if we surrender to our passions. These emotions transcend death, trapping the originator in perpetual torment. Under this emotional weight, the Illusion becomes warped and reshaped enough to allow paranormal entities to affect our world.

Carrying big emotions and/or personal traumas also weaken the Illusion, connecting us to these other sides. Even the unwary can become ensnared by these shadow realms, under the right circumstances. Indeed, these unfettered emotions can become more intense beyond the veil, staining locations and objects. When designing narratives in *Illusions and Sorrows*, the GM should examine what emotion defines the threat, and examine how it manifests physically and spiritually.

The Broken narrowly escaped a death cult. Its hedonistic members sacrifice themselves to Death Angel Gamaliel. The PC's personal trauma continually taints his relationships, instilling him with doubts and fears. Worse, the cultists' physical appetites are so intense, they can reach out from beyond the grave. The dead cultists try to drive the PC into acting out his most vile desires.

LONELINESS

Illusions and Sorrows stories frequently explore the contrast between the need for anonymity and the fear of isolation. As urban centers expand, the communal village-mentality is subsumed by the sheer weight of humanity pressing down on the individual. Privacy becomes a precious commodity, desperately sought after to preserve one's identity. Many hide their faces behind masks, figuratively and literally. Claustrophobic urban centers contain countless locations in which to disappear; sprawling residential buildings, dilapidated factors, and spidery alleys and tunnels.

In turn, loneliness invades the soul. We yearn to share an intimacy with others, to be given purpose and understanding. Deprived of meaning and significance, we succumb to ennui and frustration. We lash out or retreat within. This cancer of the spirit kills us with every passing moment. In time, we may surrender to oblivion's call and simply fade entirely from existence.

Reality Shapes Fear and Fear Shapes Reality

In *Illusions and Sorrows*, the spiritual and mundane worlds coexist, integrally linked together. This intimate relationship deeply influences Asian horror, where current societal and personal anxieties are intertwined with monster culture. Creatures are manifestations of these fears, where their true horror doesn't come from the threat they pose, but the dreadful realizations they represent. As such, the GM should design their threats around cultural and social fears, infusing them with deeper and more dreadful meaning.

Asian ghosts are often associated with death, as well as the complex rituals surrounding grief and honoring one's ancestors. Ignoring established traditions can sentence the deceased's soul to a torturous existence. In some cultures, these ghosts are stuck wandering the earth when they should be reincarnated. More importantly, restless spirits also represent unfulfilled desires and regrets, which torment our eternal souls. Thus, thematically, ghosts are despair incarnate. The fear they inspire becomes intensely personal, as they remind us of how our desires bind and corrupt our spirits. If we do not achieve peace, we're doomed to be imprisoned by our regrets.

Although the Illusion separates humanity from the supernatural realms, we dimly recognize the influence they have on our daily lives. In *Illusions and Sorrows*, the fearful creatures beyond the veil are divided into physical and ethereal categories, such as the yōkai and yūrei of Japanese mythology. Their motivations range from the mischievous to the malicious, but are rarely comprehensible. Furthermore, they're restrained by strange and immutable laws, only able to influence Elysium through specific circumstances and/or foci, such as curses, locations, objects, and rituals. This is why urban legends, local folklore, and spiritualism are so prevalent in Asian horror narratives.

- You've heard whispers of the slit-mouth woman, who kills or mutilates her victims, depending on what they say to her. A woman begins following you, always watching from the distance. She wears a bloody surgical mask over her mouth. Long scissors hang from her pale fingers.
- Your Internet-obsessed friend believes their computer is cursed, as a pop-up continually reappears, asking, "Do you like the Red Room?" They're later found dead, their room covered in blood. The pop-up appears on your phone.
- Reports of a human-faced dog (*Jinmenken*) have become widespread over the last few weeks. Some internet posts link them to a fatal mauling in the local subway. Citizens are leaving scraps out to appease its wrath. As you're walking down an alley, you hear something behind you, snuffling softly.
- An outdoor theater refuses to show movies between midnight and dawn. Rumors circulate that the projected images subtly change, revealing the otherworld. Over time, the images come to life, emerging from the screen. After several viewers disappeared, the late shows were permanently halted.

Reveal Duality in the World

Illusions and Sorrows narratives explore the concept of duality, reflecting the coexistence of the mortal and spiritual realms. More importantly, this duality blends the continuous cycles of life/death/rebirth, as well as the positive and negative aspects of the mundane and supernatural worlds. Stemming from cultural and spiritual philosophies, Asian horror rarely makes straightforward delineations between good and evil. Both the positive and negative realms have their strengths and weaknesses, and, thus, help create balance in the universe.

However, these positive and negative forces can also create havoc in our lives. As discussed above, when emotions are out of balance, they can manifest physically. Indeed, the desires and sins of humanity far outweigh the 'evils' of any spirit or monster. In turn, they reflect our weakness and wickedness, forcing us to confront ourselves. This theme resonates throughout Eastern horror stories, where supernatural threats manifest through human actions and personal failings.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, the GM can explore these concepts by narratively exploring opposing and unbalanced Principles, especially with regard to the Higher Powers. She should stylize her narratives to reflect the duality in the PCs, as well as the world around them, mirroring their positive and negative traits. They can also examine how personal traits affect the world when out of balance, altering the PC's perceptions and sense of reality to reflect this disparity.

The Avenger's desire for revenge has been growing beyond his control. This rage physically manifests as his personal tormentor, wearing the face of his victims. It taunts him daily with messages and phone calls. It also interferes in his quest for vengeance, making him suffer as his targets do. Every pain he inflict, their shadow inflicts more, perpetuating the cycle of pain and frustration – and reflecting his personal sins.

Conformity

A recurring theme in Illusions and Sorrows is the societal need and fear of conformity. Virtually every aspect of life crushes individuality, forcing the soul to conform to society's regulations and precepts. Much of this stems from the Archons and their Principles, infusing society with the desire to become cogs in the machinery. This also bolsters an unwavering desire for security and constancy. In short, any disruption to the natural order creates disharmony and fear, inspiring paranoia and distrust. This fear is frequently juxtaposed against rapidly changing technology and urbanization – the antithesis of stability and conformity.

This recurring theme may explain the prevalence of body horror in Asian horror stories. It reveals the flesh's weakness through the destruction and/or mutilation of the human form. Our bodies are malleable and can be transformed into the grotesque, separating us from humanity forever. Similarly, our sins can manifest through the deformation of our flesh, revealing them for all to see.

Under familial pressures, the PC's Relation becomes obsessed with assuming their sibling's responsibilities. The elder child died unexpectedly, disrupting the family's traditional structure. Soon, the Relation's physical appearance and mannerisms change, assuming the sibling's mien. Indeed, the dead sibling is using them to return to the living world and fulfill their duties.

Have the Unknown Invade the Known

In Illusions and Sorrows, our contemporary society offers little to no defense from the supernatural world. In many cases, modern technology actually weakens the Illusion, allowing entities from the various realms to traverse the veil and affect us. This stems from humanity's underlying fear of rapid progress and societal change, coupled with our growing dependence on technology. Furthermore, although humanity has dramatically changed, the supernatural realms have not – they've simply adapted to overcome and use our advancements to their advantage. As such, the GM should corrupt the familiar and safe, and allow the unnatural world to enter through innocuous avenues. Ghosts and demons manifest through our cell phones, televisions, and the Internet, taking advantage of our increased isolation and hidden desires.

- A malicious app continually appears on the PC's phone, reappearing when deleted. If opened, it takes over the GPS, pointing the character toward the city's underground. The location is far beneath any known structures.
- A downloadable MP3 is being passed around in private chat rooms. When played, the listener hears their final moments, usually ending in anguish. The PC's Relation has listened to it.
- An electronic billboard offers fortunes to those who bring it trinkets. Its screen presents images of future events: some positive, many negative. The more one relies upon its prophetic skills, the more it twists the person's perceptions, driving them insane with anxiety and paranoia.

Life and Death Have True Significance

Much of Eastern horror explores the cultural and spiritual importance of life and death, as well as how these dual states influence each other. This is why many narratives feature ghosts and lingering spirits, in order to explore existential and physiological concepts. The previous Principles compliment these themes, as the supernatural world influences the mundane realms, and emotions and regrets deform the human soul.

As such, the GM should make sure that ***Life and Death Have True Significance*** during the stories. When an NPC dies, it should have meaning and importance, deeply affecting the players as much as their PCs. Those who've passed on should possess personalities and motivations, held in place by their desires. This can be played up in *KULT: Divinity Lost*, as humanity's imprisonment means we must endure the continuous cycle of birth, suffering, and death. This concept, above most, intimately ties the *KULT* mythos to Asian horror narratives.

The Artist's peer begins painting disturbing canvases of her own death. This becomes compulsive, consuming her daily existence. Soon enough, she's found murdered in the same manner depicted in the paintings. The paintings become her restless soul's pathway back into the living world, inspiring others to commit suicide. The spirit's victims join her in her purgatory, providing her comfort and significance.

THE FICTION

Eastern horror narratives focus on the *action-reaction* cycle of the PCs, which are conducive to *KULT: Divinity Lost* and its conversation format. In effect, the driving force in these narratives becomes causality rather than conflict. Furthermore, *Illusion and Sorrows* narratives revolve around consequences and resolutions rather than accomplishing specific plot goals. Combined, these storytelling elements create a sense of foreboding and tension, as the PCs are swept up in horrific events, usually without understanding or truly overcoming the threat. Survival and maturation are the story's reward, where insights gained are typically personal in nature.

Threats

Events	Places	Characters
See *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46 **Cursed by Vengeful Yurei** (Hunted/Abuse) **People Killing Themselves While Sleepwalking** (Mystery/Limbo) **Character Remembers Their Role in Death Cult** (Revelation/Exclusion) **Two Families Fighting Over Past Wrongs** (Rivalry/Honor) **Forbidden Love** (Romance/Community) **Lost Forest Shrine** (Search/Gaia) **Gambling Debts Coming Due** (Wretched Excess/Avarice) **Gains Spiritual Enlightenment After Suffering** (Transfiguration/Torment)	Ramen Shop, Subway, Train Station, Manga Store, Electronic Store, Golf Range, Batting Cage, Dojo, High School, Abandoned House, Shrine, Herbal Store, Tenement, Cat Cafe, Arcade, Food Court, Night Market, Underground Mall, Business Tower, Foot Bridge, Canal, Forests, Mountain Tunnel, Alleyway, Food Stall, Fish Market, Love Hotel, Expat Hangout, Karaoke Bar, Floating House, Gentleman's Club, Entertainment Center	Street Vendor, Greeter, Academic, Business Person, Fisherman, Car Park Attendant, Shoplifter, Clinic Doctor, Store Clerk, Line Chef, Bartender, Specialist Cook, Masseuse, Gang Member, Gang Boss, Salaryman, Homeless Person, Police Officer, Taxi Driver, Hotel Attendant, Hostess, Hawker, Mahjong Player, Gambler, Bus Driver, Politician, Rickshaw Owner, Studio Artist, Front Desk Clerk, Shrine Maiden

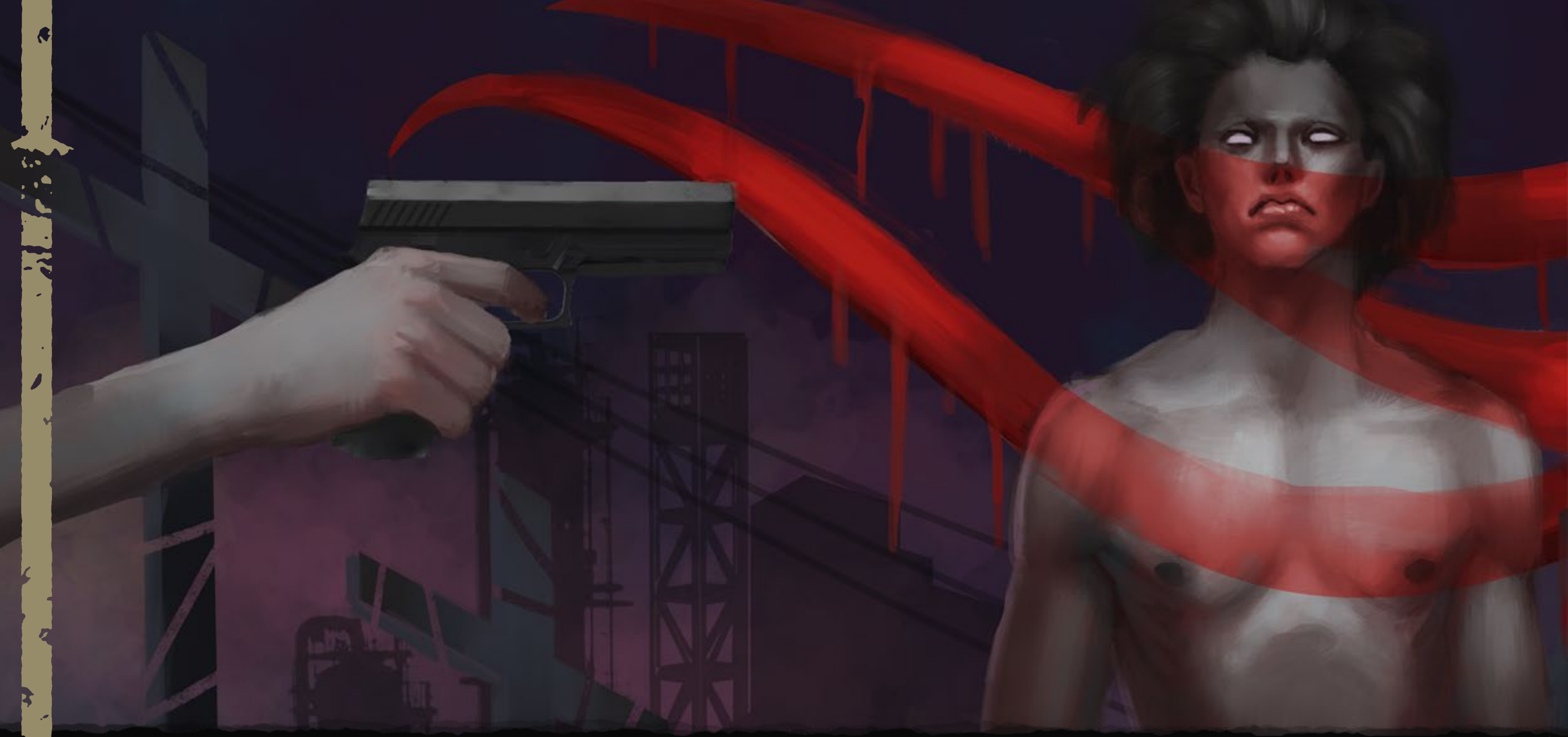
Groups	Monsters	Objects
Salary Workers, Tourists, Security Guards, Police Officers, Protestors, Street Hawkers, School Children, Monks, Praying People, Shoppers, Construction Workers, Farmers, Movers, Streetwalkers, Expats, Strolling Geisha, Rebellious Youths, Talking Elders, Karaoke Singers, Municipal Workers, Soldiers, Homeless Family	Yurei, Yokai, Tengu, Oni, Xing Tian, Nine-tailed Fox, Taotie, Jiangshi, Dokkaebi, Elementals, Goblins, Shapeshifters, Restless Spirits, Angry Ghosts, Penanggal, Namahage, Chimeric Beasts, Possessed Human, Manticore, Demonic Animal, Slit-Mouthed Woman, Dragon	Shrine Doll, Incense, Funerary Items, Computers, Ivory Chopsticks, Kimono, Decorative Box, Tapestry, Fine Ceramics, Sake Cup, Sword, Umbrella, Lucky Charms, Ancestor Shrine, Cellphone, Rickshaw Cart, Lacquered Furniture, Buddhist Statue, Ghost Money, Jade Jewelry, Stylish Watch, Fishing Pool, Skinning Knife

Variants

The Village: This reflection takes place in a rural village, focusing around the supernatural events there. Stories revolve around local mysteries; the characters trying to unravel curses and monstrous threats to themselves and their neighbors. Themes revolve around community, isolation, and tradition. The GM and players work together to define the village and its inhabitants.

Kwaidan: This reflection is set in historical Japan, usually during the Edo period. The characters are individuals struggling against the ghosts and demons of feudal Japan. They may be monks, merchants, nobles, or warriors; archetypes can be adjusted accordingly. Due to humanity's connection with the spiritual world, the Illusion continually frays, allowing yokei and yurei to walk freely in the night. Alternatively, the game can be set in other Asian countries during their major political changes, such as China during the Opium Wars.

Ghost Punk: This is an urban horror reflection where the Illusion has effectively collapsed, allowing the spiritual and mundane realms to merge. Ghosts, specters, and demons are commonplace, haunting the City and stalking its streets. Cults rule the streets, while government agencies strive to push back the supernatural menaces. In this besieged world, the PCs must try to maintain their daily lives and survive unnatural threats.



CHAPTER 14

BLOOD AND GUTS

SOMEONE WAS SCREAMING, A BLISTERING WAIL THAT STRETCHED ON and on. Eventually, Francis realized that someone is him. But even with this revelation, he continued howling, throat tearing, bleeding from the exertion. It was the only sensible response. A mortar round exploded danger close, caking him in another layer of blood-thickened mud. Lines of tracer fire stitched the night air above him, peppering the bomb crater's ruined lip. They left stains of strobing orange and red, illuminating the approaching horrors.

Across the darkened field, living shadows strode forth from the tree line, oozing forward like night and flame. Their crisped skulls shone, revealing blackened bone and teeth. Some canid, some raptor, some feline; all mockeries of predatory life. Rusted weapons and armor were fashioned into their ragged hides. Some were strangers. Some were squad mates. All remade into monsters.

In many ways, he envied their horrid condition. Better to slip away into madness and oblivion. Better to forget you were going to die and would never know why.

OVERVIEW

Blood and Guts stories abandon the traditionally slower-paced *KULT: Divinity Lost* narratives for high-octane action sequences. Hordes of undead, demonic forces, and crazed cultists take center stager as major threats. While PC goals and personal issues can (and should) be addressed, these stories primarily focus on high-stakes adventure, brutal combat, and insurmountable odds. While *Blood and Guts* campaigns are better suited for action-oriented Archetypes, non-combat focused characters can also be involved. Indeed, their lack of martial training can make for more intense and compelling stories.

Stories can be as varied as the action genre itself, their narrative foundations built upon different themes and tones. However, inspiring personal horror remains the connective element, presented through various degrees of intensity. These typically range from psychological thriller to repulsive splatterpunk, or combinations thereof. However, as fun as straight gorefests can be, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** narratives continue to explore the psychological aspects of these experiences, utilizing the action and danger to reveal the PCs' inner natures.

AGENDA

The **Blood and Guts** reflection combines extreme horror and continual action to create blood-soaked roller coaster rides. However, the GM needs to deliver an effective balance of chills and thrills. Doing so can be difficult, this reflection can easily drift too far into either category, ultimately weakening the story's effect.

Effective *action stories* are brash, loud, and thrilling, focusing heavily on PCs overcoming insurmountable odds through their skills and strength. They feature breathtaking exploits that are clear and concise, showing every blow and bullet. In contrast, effective *horror stories* are ambiguous and suspenseful, focusing on the PCs' struggle against the malicious unknown as they realize how unprepared they are to do so. They feature horrific events cloaked in mystery, shadows, and smothering dread. Yet, GMs can still combine these opposing genres by shifting the narrative focus and following revised Principles.

- Increase the Intensity, but Allow Moments for Reflection
- Tear Back the Illusion to Instill Fear and Spectacle
- Let the Action Reveal the PCs' Importance, Regardless of its Intensity

Increase the Intensity, but Allow Moments for Reflection

Blood and Guts narratives grow in intensity from the earliest stages, and rarely, if ever, let up. In many ways, this Agenda plays heavily into the *Try/Fail Cycle* (see p. 34). As the story progresses toward its crescendo, the PCs face increasingly impossible odds, adding doubt to their chances of survival. With every step forward, the PCs fall two steps back. They face new and greater threats, time constraints, and false successes. Narratively, the action's intensity drives the horror by adding greater challenges. However, without some form of reprieve, the tension-release cycle fails and the horror is diminished. As such, the GM needs to ***Increase the Intensity, But Allow Moments for Reflection***.

Between action set pieces, the GM should provide the PCs opportunities to recoup and reconsider their situation. By breaking the action up, the GM allows the accrued tension to be momentarily released. Once the players are feeling slightly at ease, the GM can introduce the next progressive threat, beginning this intensity cycle anew. This progressive approach adds impact to the story's conclusion; it feels hard won and more poignant, even if things end in tragedy.

To reach the prison's administrative offices, the PCs must fight their way across the courtyard. It is haunted by possessed guards, ready to tear them to ribbons. Upon reaching the office door, they discover the keys won't work. As one PC struggles to gain entry, the others are forced to ward off relentless attackers. Just before being overwhelmed, the door opens and they seal themselves inside. Momentarily safe, they explore the office for supplies and weapons... only to discover the staff horribly murdered.

Tear Back the Illusion to Instill Fear and Spectacle

When designing the story's set pieces, the GM needs to balance action and horror. This can be tricky, as these concepts are diametrically opposed: action thrives on spectacle, while horror develops through mystery. Furthermore, once revealed, supernatural threats begin losing their emotional impact almost immediately. The frenetic action and relentless horror can easily devolve into chaotic absurdity.

As such, *Blood and Guts* narratives should ***Tear Back the Illusion to Instill Fear and Spectacle***. The GM establishes an unrelenting ebb and flow to the conversation to keep the players off-balance. She should introduce interesting threats where players least expect them, exceeding their expectations each time. Gore and violence are employed to excite and shock, while true threats remain cloaked in mystery. In particular, the GM's realm-based Moves, see *The Illusion Tears* (*KDL*, p. 247), offer plenty of opportunities to alter the setting and increase tension. Much like a thrill ride, *Blood and Guts* assaults the PCs from all sides, turning them around and upside down, yet always progressing toward the thrilling conclusion.

Let the Action Reveal the PCs' Importance, Regardless of its Intensity

In *Blood and Guts* stories, the PCs are continually under threat, racing from one action set piece to the next. Threats are spectacular and occur at breakneck speed, testing PCs' physical and mental resolve beyond their personal limits. Quiet moments are few and far between, usually hard won and quickly dispelled. Unfortunately, this frantic pacing and raucous action can overshadow the PCs and their actions. As such, the GM must ***Let the Action Reveal the PCs' Importance, Regardless of its Intensity***. In effect, the action's true purpose is to expose the PCs' inner qualities and allow their responses to define who they are.

In many regards, this Agenda is vital for effective action-horror stories, as it shifts the narrative focus away from the spectacle and onto the PCs. This establishes their agency and importance, no matter how grand the set pieces become. Otherwise, the characters can disappear into the background, lost in the noise and fervor. One useful technique for this in action-horror is *Contrasting* (see sidebar).

Example:

After the Illusion shatters, **The Drifter** gets caught up in an apocalyptic hellscape. Constantly pursued by undead, he needs to cross the city to reach his hidden shelter. One of the NPCs travelling with him reminds him of his lost lover. Throughout the narrative, this burgeoning relationship reminds him of who he was and the person he wanted to become. He finds new purpose, evolving and regaining his confidence, even as the world crumbles around him. He begins risking himself for others, seeing the importance of every life – not just his own.

CONTRASTING

This storytelling technique helps elevate action-horror narratives by revealing the PCs' personalities through contrasting NPCs. Even though they're unique individuals, the GM assigns two NPCs who share one PC's defining personality trait, *but at opposite ends of the spectrum.* As the story progresses, they act according to these motivations, reflecting the PC. In short, the NPCs represent the PC's potential of *who they can become* while facing their current circumstances – one positive, one negative.

For example, the PC with the ***Greedy*** Disadvantage is contrasted by two NPCs: one courageous and selfless, one cowardly and self-serving. Both NPCs have believable and familiar motivations, acting in the ways they think best. As the story progresses, their actions reflect the PC's possible choices, allowing the player to see two potential paths for their PC's progression. Do they risk their lives to help others, without compensation? Do they help others, but only if they're potentially useful later on? Do they take advantage of those in need, cutting them loose at the first opportunity?

PRINCIPLES

Blood and Guts stories are hectic and fast-paced affairs, throwing the PCs into terrifying situations beyond their control. Stories frequently involve grand set pieces, where the PCs are overwhelmed and challenged by both locations and conflicts. In many cases, the main adversary becomes a set piece onto themselves, potentially overshadowing the PCs. Yet, between the noise and spectacle, there can be humor, joy, and sadness.

These tonal shifts and narrative accents can help flavor the brash and raucous qualities of action-horror that are the antithesis of *KULT: Divinity Lost's* reflective and foreboding nature. The following Principles provide directions for balancing chills and thrills in equal measure, as well as effectively handling the contrasting tonal shifts throughout the conversation.

Keep the Action Fast and Furious

Blood and Guts stories focus on continual action and violence, where conflicts are fast, intense, and suspenseful. In many cases, physical challenges and combat are the centerpieces of each scene, forcing the PCs into increasingly impossible situations. However, as in most roleplaying games, combat mechanics can slow the gameplay down considerably. Similarly, unlike actual combat, where split-second decisions mean the difference between life and death, the players are allowed to pause and consider their actions. Unfortunately, this tends to slow the narrative down further, rather than reflect the quickened pace. In turn, this detracts from the overall story and dispels any tension from the scene. As such, the GM should encourage more speed and fluidity to conflicts.

One technique for doing so is setting time-limits when players use ***Engage in Combat*** or similar Moves. When their turn to act arrives, provide the player roughly seven seconds to declare their action. If they do not respond, their PC is considered frozen with fear/indecision. Depending on the situation, this failure to act may result in complications, such as injuries, lost equipment, or giving an opportunity to their adversary. Simply remember to ***Be a Fan of the Player Characters***; do not unnecessarily punish them. This technique is meant to encourage fast pacing and quick thinking, adding to the tension. Don't spring this technique on players without getting their consent first!

In contrast, allow players more leeway in describing their Moves and don't punish their failures as severely. Play upon the action-thriller tropes, where the PCs can accomplish the near-impossible. Speed up minor combat scenes by trimming back the mechanics, yet focus heavily on important, dramatic moments where every punch matters. Unlike survival horror, hero-injuries are common, allowing PCs to go well beyond their limits. Stress pain and suffering, but don't completely hinder the sufferers.

Finally, since combats are centerpieces to the story, allow each player to contribute in some regard, even if their PCs aren't martially trained. This can be through the PC's actions, or the player offering some narrative description that accents the scene in a GM-like role, so long as the description helps the other characters. When the end comes, allow the PCs to exit in some grand manner, allowing them their moment of poignant sacrifice.

Example:

After failing several rolls, **The Criminal** finds himself separated from the group and cornered by skinless creatures. Mechanically, this combat could take a while, breaking the narrative tension. After gaining a *success with complications*, the GM asks the player to define their actions. They describe *The Criminal* frantically unloading his handgun, again and again, shooting anything that moves. Rather than record damage for the individual creatures, the GM simply describes the scene of carnage, bodies stacked high, their blood spreading like oil. All the attackers are dead, but the PC has expended the last of their ammunition.

Make the Antagonist the Show-Piece

In *Blood and Guts*, the antagonist becomes the story's driving motivation, usually as someone (or *thing*) to be overcome or escaped. Truly memorable antagonists accent and mirror the PCs, revealing their strengths and flaws. Furthermore, it should possess abilities and/or qualities that sustain its interactions throughout the entire narrative, continually driving it forward by testing the PCs' resolve. This also allows the players their cinematic finale against a daunting foe, providing a thrilling and hard-won victory.

As the story progresses, the GM should utilize the antagonist in their main Moves, as well as bombs, to continually ramp up the story's tension. Be it animal, human, or supernatural, the antagonist must be relentless in achieving their goals: typically, destroying the PCs and their world. Alternatively, the antagonist can be some incredible force, such as an endless horde of purgatides or Children of the Underground. Even if they are mindless, the GM needs to ramp up the tension through their actions, transforming the narrative into an ever-escalating thrill ride.

Example:

Through bad luck and timing, the PCs stumble upon some horrible crime in progress. Worse still, the Illusion has shattered due to the violence, allowing them to see the perpetrator's true form – a lictor. Desperate to eliminate the witnesses, the lictor pursues the PCs into Metropolis's wasteland. It is ruthless and cunning, as well as able to summon minions to help its hunt. The PCs must survive this monstrosity's game of cat-and-mouse, as well as find their way back home.

Inspire Intensity Over Spectacle

Although action remains at the core of *Blood and Guts* stories, it can easily overshadow the horror with spectacle and violence. As mentioned previously, action thrives on showing heroic deeds and grand displays, while horror thrives on quiet dread and facing the unknown. As such, the GM needs to create intensity and tension through personalized Threats.

One method for achieving this is by making the PCs feel vulnerable, even overpowered. The threats they face should appear impossible, as well as be horrific and unknowable. Another method is by defying the players' expectations, flipping traditional tropes on their head, and playing on their natural assumptions. Make anyone expendable, killing off vital NPCs without warning. Place the PCs in desperate situations with no apparent means of escape. Steal their sense of security by depriving them of their tools or using their plans against them. In doing so, the GM triggers the PCs' natural *fight/flight/freeze* instincts, as they will not know how to respond. This, in turn, creates narrative intensity and – more importantly – fear.

Example:

The PCs enter the police station, only to find it deserted. There are signs of violence everywhere: limbs, blood, broken furniture, and hundreds of shell casings. Yet, no bodies are found. After they've gathered up the guns and remaining ammo, one of the walkie-talkies sputters to life. An inhuman voice says, "Come back outside. Those things are still in there." Nearby, one of the doors slowly creaks open, revealing an impenetrable darkness.

Use Set Pieces to Increase Tension

What's scarier than facing down legions of Inferno-spawn? Being trapped with the demonic hordes on a sinking oil rig, surrounded by stormy seas. In *Blood and Guts*, the setting acts as a character onto itself, as well as generating additional hardships for the PCs. Even in the mundane world, the GM should introduce unique locations and transform standard settings into exciting deathtraps. In each scene, the PCs move through this frantic landscape, experiencing awe and terror through unexpected challenges.

As such, the GM should also consider intriguing set pieces to accent the story, as well as enhance the overall fiction. Numerous environmental qualities can produce new Threats and obstacles, such as weather, remoteness, and impending disasters. The GM can also increase the tension by shattering the Illusion, allowing the terrors of Metropolis, Inferno, and Limbo to run free.

Example:

The PCs are visiting a ski resort when the entire mountain is struck by a vicious blizzard. Although the building offers every luxury, they're effectively cut off from civilization, left no chance of rescue until the storm abates. Through the snowy winds, they see vast towers of alien design. Then hideous things ascend from below, assailing the resort in ceaseless waves.

Employ Frequent Tonal Shifts

While action-packed, *Blood and Guts* narratives cannot perpetually sustain their frantic pace – especially in roleplaying settings. Furthermore, continually focusing on nonstop action weakens the horror aspects of the story, as it dispels mystery and suspense. As such, the GM should allow the conversation to undergo well-paced dramatic and emotional tonal shifts. Comedy, in particular, is commonly used in action-horror to elevate tension and refocus the story.

These emotional 'breathers' allow the PCs – and players – opportunities to recoup from their struggles. Much like a roller coaster ride, the rise and fall in pacing provides the players both relief and anticipation of the next thrill. However, the GM must remember that each tonal shift needs to make narrative sense, otherwise, it feels disingenuous and disruptive. Furthermore, these shifts are meant to support, not dispel, the feelings of fear and suspense. Indeed, they should accent the more intense and introspective moments, providing emotional weight.

Example:

Deep in the Underworld, the PCs and their companions find themselves cut off from the world above. Having just survived a harrow attack, they hole up in an old fallout shelter. They discover some supplies, fresh clothes, and unspoiled food, as well as places to rest. As they eat and recoup, small groups form, talking and joking nervously. One of the NPCs admits their feelings to the PC, promising to be better if they survive. Another NPC privately breaks down, apologizing for getting everyone into the current situation.

Threats

Events	Places	Characters
See *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46 **Rescue Relation from Jackals Who've Overtaken Logging Camp** (Liberate/Torment) **Animals Dying En Masse With No Obvious Reason** (Mystery/Discord) **Survivors of Medical Experiment Are Summoned Back to Scene of Crime** (Revelation/Community) **Trapped between Two Warring Angelic Choirs** (Rivalry/Conflict) **Unhealthy Affection Develops Under Pressure** (Romance/Lust) **Find the Crew of a Ghost Ship** (Search/Fear) **Goes into Withdrawal at Worst Time** (Wretched Excess/Compulsion) **Lover Infected and Changing into Monster** (Transmutation/Awakening)	Secluded Farmhouse, Old Tenement Building, Cruise Ship, Moving Train, Glittering High-Rise, Underground Tunnels, Collapsing Cave System, Frozen Military Outpost, Primordial Forest, Stormy Mountain Top, Ancient Ruins, Closed Shopping Mall, Mortuary, Urban Wasteland, Biker Bar, Hellish Jungle, Active Battlefield, Subway System, Science Facility, Amusement Park, Prison Complex, Airplane in Flight	Crooked Cop, Urban Adventurer, Hysteric Businessman, Frantic Civilian, Gang Member, Biker, Soldier, Mercenary, Rogue Scientist, Special Agent, Fixer, Corporate Goon, Crazed Cultist, Doubting Policeman, Tour Guide, Expert Driver, Logger, Park Ranger, Medical Specialist, War Veteran, Corrupt Agent, Urban Explorer, Hunter

Group	Monsters	Objects
Cultists, Jackals, Police Officers, Soldiers, Mercenaries, Gang Members, Special Forces, Confused Survivors, Violent Townspeople, Innocent Civilians, Gangsters, Government Agents, Freed Criminals, Frightened Tenants, Medical Team, Corporate Drones, Scientific Exploration, Frightened Refugees, Ship's Crew, Trapped Workers	Children of the Night, Undead, Angels, Demons, Infected Madmen, Alien Monstrosities, Hungry Undead, Possessed Children, Mutated Animals, Biological Abominations, Uplifted Predators, Amalgamated Corpses, Kaiju, Nameless Horrors, Skinwalkers, Elysium Gods, Cyclopean Cryptid	Guns, Explosives, Fast Cars, Archaic Weapons, Stolen Goods/Money, Computers & Hacking Equipment, Lock Picks, Body Armor, Drugs, Blessed Sword, Military Equipment, Alien Artifacts, Unholy portal, Arcane Weaponry, Cursed Machinery, Magical Wards, Altered Materials

THE FICTION

In *Blood and Guts*, action should remain the primary focus when defining your fiction. For the most part, ***KULT: Divinity Lost's*** underlying psychological and existential horrors are replaced by sheer adrenaline and chaos. Movement and rapid pacing are key to these stories. Aspects of the fiction should reflect this world of excitement and terror. Even so, the GM should try to avoid common tropes when generating stories, instead approaching the subject matter in fresh, exciting ways.

Variations

The Squad – The PCs belong to some elite force combating the forces of darkness. Typically, these stories revolve around the squad investigating and eliminating potential threats to humanity. This reflection is well suited for campaign-style stories, as the PCs are pitted against increasingly powerful enemies to save the world. The GM should also allow the players to contribute to the downtime, defining their organization and its membership, and providing them somewhere to interact and recuperate.

No Hell But What We Make – The PCs belong to an organization/group that seeks to uncover some hidden truth or defy the boundaries of science. Most – if not all – are mundane academics, scientists, and administrative staff with little-to-no martial training. Through their actions, they inadvertently unleash some supernatural threat, which seeks to destroy them. If they do not overcome this malign force, all of humanity could suffer for their mistakes. Although better suited for one-shot scenarios, the PCs' failure could ultimately result in an *We Unlucky Few*-style campaign (see below).

Playthings of the Gods – The PCs are normal human beings ensnared in blood sports to amuse an unseen tormentor. They're forced to endure increasingly difficult and violent tests of endurance and will, where the price of failure is death. They may also be condemned by society for crimes they did (or did not) commit. The contest is their sole chance for freedom, potentially placing the PCs against one another.

CHAPTER 15

WE UNLUCKY FEW

HEATHER’S HEART SANK. FOR THE THIRD DAY, THE SNARES REMAINED EMPTY. “Dammit,” Liam cursed. She shared his disappointment. And hunger. Slinging her rifle, she checked the traps, “They should have worked.” He griped, “Should have doesn’t cut it anymore.” She bit her tongue. What’d Liam expect? She was a goddamned librarian. Three weeks ago, she’d been shelving books, not searching for food. She sighed, “Just keep watch will you?”

The city park had been consumed by verdant nightmares, impossible trees and shrubs defiling its former beauty. Nearby, the children’s playground lay hidden beneath glistening vines and perverse flowers. Heather remembered taking her niece there. The hole where that memory lived still ached. She swallowed the pain and focused on the snares.

At first, she felt confusion. And then fear. One trap had been mangled; its bait missing. Fresh blood darkened the ground around it. She had caught something. And then something else had taken it. “Liam?” she hissed, recoiling. Liam turned, staring blankly. But she was too distracted to speak. In the thick brush near him, golden eyes stared out. So many eyes. And teeth. Heather did the only rational thing. She ran. And ignored the screams that followed.

OVERVIEW

The *We Unlucky Few* reflection explores survival horror themes and tones, where humanity faces undefeatable odds in horrific circumstances. Outmatched, outgunned, and lacking vital resources, regular people are pushed beyond their limits, as their normal lives are washed away in chaos and confusion. Tragedy and terror force the PCs to make impossible choices, where the worst monsters may be the people beside them. From natural disasters to zombie apocalypses, danger lurks around every corner. The wrong decision can lead to agonizing death – or worse.

AGENDA

We Unlucky Few stories focus on psychological horror, as much as enduring physical trauma. Although they share common themes, survival horror stories differ from action horror narratives, abandoning frantic conflicts and grand set-pieces for intimate struggles and heavy sacrifices. Furthermore, violence is unforgiving and deadly. Stories focus more on planning, problem-solving, and overcoming obstacles, with violence as a tragic last resort. While *We Unlucky Few* settings vary greatly, the PCs are usually isolated and deprived of exterior assistance, adding to their difficulties.

In ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, survival horror can involve both wilderness and urban survival stories, pitting the PCs against numerous natural and supernatural threats. Due to the increased potential for character death, this reflection is appropriate for one-shot scenarios. However, with some adjustments, *We Unlucky Few* stories can be lengthy campaigns. The latter usually involves expanding the standardized fiction, requiring the GM to develop their apocalyptic setting prior to the First Session.

Although *We Unlucky Few* stories parallel the standard Agendas, there are subtle differences in how the GM upholds the themes of survival horror. In short, the Agendas focus on maintaining the continued need for safety and sustenance, as well as establishing an aura of impending doom and desperation. Milestones and threats become increasingly important in this playstyle, generating meaningful goals and increasing narrative tension. Effective survival horror stories explore the emotional resonance of the PCs and their experiences.

- Tear Back the Illusion to Reveal True Reality's Threats.
- Keep the Characters Under Pressure to Survive Their New World.
- Characters' action should have an impact on their survival.

Tear Back the Illusion to Reveal Reality's Threats

The PCs' world has been dramatically transformed, thrusting them into continual danger and nightmarish terrors. The transformation's scale can be as localized or widespread as the GM requires for the established fiction. In ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** cataclysmic events can rupture the Illusion through the trauma and fear they generate. Once revealed, the True Reality's influence usually remains constant throughout the story. As such, the GM should ***Tear Back the Illusion to Reveal Reality's Threats***, continually weaving supernatural horrors into the narrative. However, these should only accent the narrative's core threat, not overshadow it. The overarching disaster remains the ultimate danger to the PCs and their survival.

> The typhoon descends upon the city, causing widespread destruction, and trapping the PCs with extreme flooding and damaging winds. Mysteriously, the storm does not dissipate and they must contend with no power, food, or clean drinking water. Soon, monstrosities emerge from the darkness, dredged up by the primal sea. As the days wear on, the city begins merging with ruined sections of Metropolis. The PCs' sanctuary will not last and they must eventually venture into the storm's fury.

Keep the Characters Under Pressure to Survive Their New World

In their ruined world, the PCs are assailed by daily pressures to survive. They are continually denied the most basic resources, such as food, water, and shelter. As society fails around them, they are forced to rely on themselves and each other. NPCs may force them to make hard choices or be entirely hostile. In addition, they may be responsible for the care and protection of their Relations, who will be experiencing the same challenges. In this unforgiving world, their mistakes can lead to tragic consequences.

As such, the GM should ***Keep the Characters Under Pressure to Survive Their New World*** by continually introducing new threats, denying them basic resources, and forcing the players to rationalize their actions, rather than simply fight. The GM has numerous Moves at their disposal, such as ***Put Someone in a Bad Spot***, ***Take Their Stuff***, and ***Turn Their Move Against Them***, to keep the PCs struggling and perpetually off-balance. The *Try/Fail* cycle (see p. 34) plays heavily into survival horror, as players should feel they're hanging on by sheer luck. Whether they fail or overcome each hardship, they should feel its narrative weight.

Example:

> The PCs locate an overturned truck. Its contents are scattered everywhere, containing much-needed water, food, and medical supplies. As they approach it, they hear the rumblings of an approaching hell storm (***Announce Future Problems***). If they seek shelter, the burning rain will likely destroy their discovery. If they gather the supplies, they may be caught in the storm themselves. What do they do?

Characters' Actions Should Have an Impact on Their Survival

The narrative weight of survival horror relies heavily on the questions, *What would I do?* and *Could I survive this*? The GM should continually inspire the players to ask these questions of themselves, as they vicariously explore the psychological fears and traumas placed upon their PCs. Indeed, this should be the core essence of *We Unlucky Few* games. As such, the ***Characters' Actions Should Have Impact on Their Survival***, as this provides the players with a sense of agency and investment.

Each choice the PCs make, every action they take, all have potentially dire and long-lasting consequences. Narratively, some of these repercussions may not manifest until much later, and extend beyond what they may foresee at the time. Furthermore, when the PCs make the right decision, their successes feel more important and hard-won, deepening their players' investment in the story. As always, the GM mustn't take an adversarial approach when employing this Agenda. If the PCs suffer harsh consequences, it should be something that they did wrong rather than resulting from ill luck. Realism must be maintained throughout the story, where consequences have logical underpinnings.

Example:

While scavenging, the PCs' vehicle gets low on gasoline. Unfortunately, they've been unable to locate the medical supplies desperately needed by people back home. They have no clue if their continued search will end in success. Rather than risk being stranded, they players decide to turn back for the day. That night, one of their untreated companions succumbs to their sickness. The illness continues spreading, unabated.

PRINCIPLES

Due to the overt nature of survival horror stories, *We Unlucky Few* narratives tend to shift away from the game's subtle Principles, such as ***Insinuate the Supernatural***. Instead, the PCs are continually assailed by supernatural occurrences and direct threats, as well as facing an endless struggle to acquire even basic survival needs. Although the players may never fully understand the threat their PCs face, they're continually aware of the dangers around them. Even when provided an opportunity to rest, they're reminded of what has been lost; the world as they knew it no longer exists. Indeed, it may never exist again. The person they were before the cataclysm is gone, and a new one lives in their place. Times of reflection are more poignant and precious, goals to be fought for at all costs. The following Principles can help the GM reflect the themes and tones of survival horror narratives, as well as balance between relentless dread and unwavering hope.

Reveal the Threat Through Cause and Effect

In *We Unlucky Few*, the GM frames personal narratives around the central threat and its effect on the PCs. This is particularly important, as the PCs' actions result in both immediate and far-reaching consequences. The GM should consider three factors in each cause-effect cycle: *the overall threat*, *the PC's actions*, and *how significant NPCs may be affected*. The GM can combine these factors into moments of crisis, and the conversation progresses through new and escalating challenges.

In longer stories, the GM can incorporate secondary and tertiary threats as narrative complications begin snowballing, feeding off one another. The players should never feel entirely safe after taking an action, always waiting for the next shoe to drop. In this manner, the story's core threat is continually intruding on their lives, affecting their decisions.

Example:

The story's main threat involves several Dream Princes invading Elysium, causing nightmares and reality to merge together. The PCs discover that their dreams can physically manifest when they sleep, unleashing surreal monsters. Now, they must take special precautions, as dreaming can kill the PCs and others. However, not resting weakens them, making them more vulnerable to existing threats. Similarly, NPCs naturally fear other people, who are foci for nightmares, treating the PCs with distrust and/or outward hostility.

Allow the Characters Time to Reflect

Although survival is key, overcoming grueling hardships and relentless threats shouldn't be the sole focus of survival horror stories. The GM should allow the PCs opportunities to reflect on what's important to them and what they can lose if they fail. Beyond their daily lives, PCs should consider their family and friends, as well as how to preserve and/or rebuild their former world. The GM can incorporate these brief reminders throughout the narrative, as well as the enhanced version of downtime (see below). Allow players moments of peace and reflection during the conversation, as well as time to make new goals and develop plans for the future.

Example:

Upon returning to their sanctuary, the PCs are welcomed to their first hot meal in days. While they were away, traders brought fresh supplies and news from the neighboring town. They're allowed to eat and socialize with each other and their fellow survivors. For that fleeting moment, the camp feels almost peaceful and safe, the outside world temporarily forgotten.

Use Downtime to Set Survival Goals

In survival horror campaigns, the PCs face dangers from within and without, and must always be planning for the future. During downtime, the GM allows the players time to develop plans for managing resources, upgrading the PCs' tools and shelter, and exploring their surroundings. The players are encouraged to roleplay these discussions, deepening their personal investment in the story and overcoming its threats.

In turn, the GM can prepare new Threats and bombs based on these suggestions, laying out obstacles for future stories. The GM can introduce Moves for their Relations, leading to Threats in the next scenario/session. Social interactions and relationships may improve or suffer during these downtimes, altering their communities. The PCs' actions can also create Reactions from other NPCs and Groups/Organizations, as well as attract the unwanted attention of Creatures.

This enhanced downtime allows the PCs to recover from traumas and injuries. Lacking proper medical care, food/water, and shelter may prevent healing or make injuries worse. Mental issues may worsen, either for the characters and/or the NPCs, possibly leading to conflicts in subsequent sessions. The GM should draw from ***The Reality of Pain*** (see p. 189) for inspiration.

Example:

During downtime, the players and GM – roleplaying their fellow survivors – meet to discuss the group's sanctuary and plan for the future. They have limited potable water, which strains their continued existence at this location. A reservoir exists ten blocks away, but the route is heavily patrolled by a cruel militia. Some NPCs want to risk clearing the route, while others wish to move the permanent camp. Both choices can lead to future conflicts and potential dangers. The group looks to the PCs to offer their opinions and/or additional solutions.

Diminish Character Reliance on Combat

In *We Unlucky Few*, combat is de-emphasized, as constant physical conflicts can inadvertently shift the narrative toward more adventure/action-based stories. This can potentially obscure the survival horror themes of vulnerability and desperation, and makes players more reliant on violence to solve their problems. Instead, the GM can guide the conversation away from combat by limiting weapons and ammunition, introducing multiple and stronger Threats, and increasing wound severity (i.e., more severe **Harm** penalties). This disempowerment creates additional tension and the sense of exposure, forcing players to carefully evaluate every action.

In turn, they can reward clever and cautious players, who utilize character advantages and skills to avoid and resolve Threats. If the PCs avoid or run away from combat, do not penalize them for this choice. Offer new opportunities for them to explore and take advantage of. Each encounter survived becomes their triumph, and inspires players to rethink the standard roleplaying tropes.

Example:

The GM wants to reduce the players' reliance on heavy weapons. They introduce creatures that are effectively immune to firearms and need to be hacked to pieces. They're incredibly dangerous in close-quarters, making direct assaults very dangerous. However, the creatures are effectively blind, and rely entirely on sound. As such, the PCs can sneak by and/or distract them rather than directly attack them.

Determine Story Length Early

For *We Unlucky Few* games, the GM and players should determine the story's length prior to character development: a single one-shot, linked scenarios, or an open-ended campaign. This helps the GM determine how much world-building needs to be completed ahead of time, as well as what Event types are best suited for the fiction. In shorter stories, direct threat levels can be increased, pushing the PCs toward more immediate resolutions. In lengthy stories, the focus leans toward long-term survival, day-to-day threats, and personal interactions. The story's intensity can also change as the campaign progresses, allowing for intriguing narrative shifts.

The GM and players decide one a long-term campaign. The story begins with a massive dream-based cataclysm. As such, the initial narrative starts hectically, focusing on frantic survival. This evolves into more day-to-day survival stories, after the PCs have established their new community.

The Everyman

One prevalent theme in survival horror is the *Everyman*. Unlike the combat-oriented Archetypes prevalent in adventure/action horror stories, *We Unlucky Few* narratives focus on mundane people thrust into impossible situations. As such, these stories are perfectly suited for the *Sleeper* Archetype, as well as less martially skilled *Aware* PCs. Rather than relying on their fighting Advantages and supernatural skills, the PCs must survive through their smarts and resilience alone. Furthermore, the players can more easily empathize and identify with ordinary characters, which adds tension to an already horrific situation. This also increases the sense of accomplishment when the PCs do overcome their situation, as they've truly earned their victory.

Excample:

The story features an office building mysteriously falling through the Illusion and reappearing in Inferno. The players are normal people who were in the building at the time. They are office workers, janitorial staff, and visiting clients. With few exceptions, none of them are remotely trained to face the legions of darkness surrounding the building.

THE FICTION

We Unlucky Few features themes similar to most ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** stories, but shifts the prevalent focus toward despair, isolation, mourning, and survival. In addition to standard Threats, the GM should examine how the PCs endure the constant physical dangers and stresses, the psychological and emotional traumas, and their sense of loss and nostalgia. The following concepts can be incorporated into any scenario/campaign, helping to enhance the survival horror themes.

This is the End

Optionally, the GM and players can incorporate themselves as characters in *We Unlucky Few*, weaving the apocalypse into their current lives. This personalized approach deepens their connection to the story, forcing them to ask, *Could I Survive This?* However, this personalized approach can strain the Horror Contract, potentially revealing personal fears and traumas. The lack of separation between the player and PC may also be unnerving – especially in events of character death. As such, the group must provide *unanimous consent* when incorporating this play-style.

External Threat, Internal Horror

Although survival horror stories involve exterior dangers, the true horror is internal. Despite the far-reaching perils around them, the PCs' Dark Secrets, Disadvantages, and traumas drive the story forward. The GM uses these traits to customize the conversation and fiction, generating individualized threats for the PCs to deal with. In doing so, they filter the narrative's grander scale down to more personalized and, thus, relatable conflicts.

Example:

The PC glances down from the fire-escape at the creatures below. Immediately, a familiar face reveals itself amongst their masses, recognizable even beneath bloated and grayish flesh. Their old lover; a whirlwind romance that haunted them with longings and regrets. Dead eyes stare back at them, ichor dripping from the hole in their throat.

The most dangerous Threats can be those standing beside the PCs. Stories should also introduce conflicts between PCs and NPCs, reflecting their inner turmoils and personal traumas bubbling over. The GM can create Threats that trigger these internal horrors, undermining the PCs' concept of trust and safety. They can also play upon the players' paranoia and mistrust, allowing them to form their own conclusions – be they actual threats or not.

Example:

As you watch, Klaus taps the knife between his splayed fingers; the rhythmic thunk of metal on wood grating on your nerves. Blood trickles from several lacerations, but he ignores them. The pace quickens, and more blood flows.

The GM should pay special attention to PC **Stability**, as opportunities for mental healing may be infrequent under the continual strain. Over time, the PCs may develop new Disadvantages or mental traumas, such as ***Depression*** and ***Nightmares***. During the conversation, the GM can subtly alter the PC's perceptions, reflecting their psychological changes and wounds. Depending on their **Stability** level, these mental issues may linger with the PC throughout the session. However, once they've gained some clarity during downtime, the mental imbalance heals or becomes an actual Disadvantage, if severe enough.

Example:

After a particularly harrowing experience, the PC develops an uncontrollable fear of the dark. This lingers with him for days, haunting his waking moments and sleep. The GM introduces hallucinations – visual and auditory – of things in the night. Soon enough, he's jumping at every shadow. Once the PC returns to his sanctuary, rest and peace allows him to overcome this temporary phobia.

Isolation

Isolation features heavily in survival horror narratives, both imposed and self-inflicted. humanity relies and thrives on interconnectivity, yearning for personal relationships that fulfill and make us whole. However, in survival horror, PCs are left abandoned by society and separated from friends and family through circumstances beyond their control. Concepts like faith, hope, and trust are crushed beneath cruel betrayals and harsh realities. Paranoia and mistrust reign, forcing PCs deeper into isolation and eroding their humanity.

Example:

Gaia has unleashed virulent infections that indue fever, hallucinations, violent tendencies, and eventually death. However, the contagious stage is asymptomatic and lasts for several days. People retreat from society, as anyone could be a potential plague carrier. Once infected, the victims become ticking time-bombs, forcing family and friends to make impossible choices to stay alive.

An insidious aspect of isolation is the dehumanization of the Other. As laws and social structure crumble, compassion and morality lose their meaning. People in power create scapegoats, indulging their paranoia and petty concerns. Driven by self-concerns, they inflict pain and suffering upon others to assure their own survival. Other humans become resources to be used, rather than individuals with feelings, hopes, and needs. Innocents are swallowed up by the dystopian horrors around them, their importance forgotten.

Example:

As the world crumbles, the government turns against the dissenters and undesirables, marking them as terrorists and social pariahs to be purged from the whole. People of different faiths and sexual-orientation are rounded up for 'deportation,' kept in cages along the streets, ridiculed and tormented by passersby.

Hope and Faith

Despite the bleakness of survival horror, hope resonates throughout their narratives. Even at their darkest moments, most people maintain their personal faith and push back against the dying light. Indeed, time and time again, humans reveal their potential for compassion and sacrifice. Even in Hell, we reach for the divine.

Without hope, these stories lose their emotional impact and importance. Players will soon grow bored and frustrated if their actions result in perpetual strings of failures and losses. Reward them for their inner strength and compassion, as their actions change the world around them. By incorporating moments of hope and solace, the GM inspires the players with purpose, as well as makes their stories more poignant (see ***Allow the Characters Time to Reflect***). This also makes the losses more impactful, as they have more meaning.

Example:

Lost and hungry, the PCs are rescued by another group of survivors. They're brought into the group's camp – an old church. The priest is tending to people of all races, religions, and beliefs. They ask nothing in return, only that the PCs pass this kindness on to anyone they encounter.

Threats

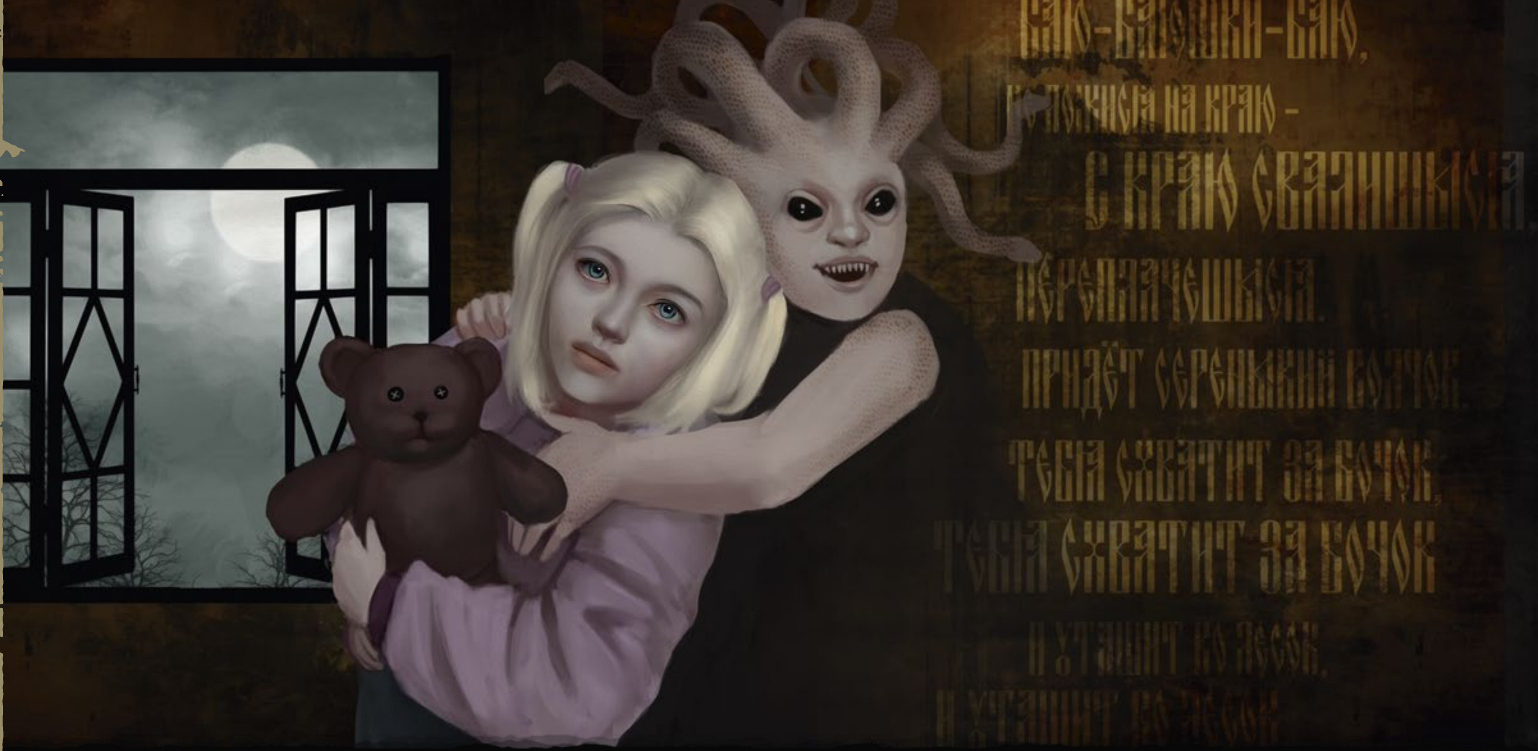
Events	Places	Characters
See *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46 **Trapped in Refuge** (Hunted/Safety) **Signal for Help** (Mystery/Community) **Stealing Limited Supplies** (Revelation/Honor) **Mutating Infection** (Transmutation/Exclusion) **Treatment or Triage** (Search/Conformity) **Forbidden Alliance** (Romance/Conflict) **Doomsday Preacher** (Rivalry/Submission)	Alley, Farm House, Cabin in the Woods, Backroads, Prison, Shopping Mall, Underground Bunker, Gas Station, Convenience Store, Cave, Cemetery, Forest, Ghost Town, Haunted House, Asylum/Hospital, Jungle, Basement, Laboratory, Mansion, Holiday Getaway, High-Rise, Hotel, Modernist Home, Tenement Flat, University, High School	Survivalist, Scavenger, Madman, Beggar, Soldier, Orphaned Child, Injured Civilian, Starving Family, Hunter, Raider, Law Enforcement Officer, Militia, Innocent, Infected, Possessed, Journalist/Writer, Academic, Construction Worker, Tyrannical Leader, Gang Member, Nihilist, Optimist, Ne'er-do-well, Protector, Cultist

Group	Monsters	Objects
Military Unit, Law Enforcement, Helpful Survivors, Raiders, Doomsday Cult, Looters, Possessed Crazies, Government Agency, Armed Militia, Survivalists, Biker Gang, Convoy, Medical Relief	Living Dead, Wolvens, Nepharites, Children of the Underworld, Azghouls, Borderlanders, Nachtkäfer, Crustacz, Erinyes, Ferocco, Jatharna, Methusa, Cairath, Elysium's Gods	Canned Food, Water Purifier, First Aid Kit, Grave Marker, Sleeping Bag, Keys to Vehicle, Survival Tent, Weapon Stash, Bloodied Backpack, Rope, Working Radio, Toolkit, Inexhaustible Flashlight, maps, Compass, Strange Obelisk, Severed Hand Holding Something

Variants

Demon City: Demon City details what happens if the PCs are trapped in Metropolis or one of the other Realms. This may involve smaller groups of people being pulled through a portal. It may even involve buildings, neighborhoods, or an entire city. For example: What if – at the end of The Black Madonna – Leningrad actually shifted over to Inferno? The PCs are not only faced by the standard difficulties posed by hostile environments, but must also combat supernatural threats as well.

The Great Darkness: Some global event throws humanity back into the Dark Ages. All electricity, communications, and powered vehicles are rendered useless. In truth, the Archons have united to destroy the technological world, hoping humanity will return to its more controllable state. Worse yet, the Death Angels and their kin wait beyond our firelight, eager to feed on our souls.


Баю-баюшки-баю,
не ложися на краю -
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Придёт серенький волчок
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Тебя схватит за бочок
И утащит во лесок,
И утащит во лесок

CHAPTER 16

AFTERNOON HORRORS

JOHAN IGNORED THE ICE GROANING BENEATH HIS FEET. HE KNEW THAT the frozen lake would support them, but as the night wrapped around him, irrational fears rose in his chest. Rune and Tove led them toward the lone ice-shack, racing the setting sun. Beside him, Camilla managed a shy, tired smile. He wished she'd stay behind, but she wanted to help her friends. And Johan himself? Well, he wanted to make sure the twins didn't get Camilla hurt.

Since his niece's disappearance, Rune obsessively began searching for her. Together with Tove, they'd rope Johan and Camilla into their investigation. It'd been sort of fun at first, sneaking into their grandfather's farmhouse, rummaging through strange trinkets and books. And then it wasn't so fun anymore. They'd found things hidden in the toolshed. Bad things.

The shack squatted in the snow. Its green door was slightly ajar, emitting an orangish glow. "There shouldn't be anyone in there," Tove said. Johan reached for Camilla's mittened hand, "Stay close. I don't like this." Rune and Tove disappeared inside. When Johan reached the door, the twins stood only a few feet inside. Bathed in hellish light, the wooden interior stretched off impossibly. Somewhere in the distance, a young girl was crying.

OVERVIEW

As kids, we're delighted with being scared. We dare each other to watch horror movies, and tell ghost stories late into the night. Unsurprisingly, *young adult horror's* popularity in cinema, literature, and roleplaying games has grown, garnering new audiences. **Afternoon Horrors** focuses on juveniles and teens experiencing and learning the truths of their terrifying world. Due to its esoteric nature and disturbing concepts, ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** might seem ill-suited for young adult horror. However, with some narrative and tonal adjustments, the GM and players can explore intriguing stories in this genre.

Even so, the *Afternoon Horrors* reflection needs to be handled with care, understanding, and, most of all, maturity. Our childhood fears and traumas are very real, ingrained into us like scars. As such, the GM and players must be cognizant of the Horror Contract; perhaps, even more so than in most ***KULT: Divinity Lost*** conversations. *Afternoon Horrors* can venture into very dark areas, exploring unpleasant themes. Adolescence experience traumas of body, mind, and soul, and this can be deeply uncomfortable, even harmful, for players. Take care when engaging with these themes.

AGENDA

Narratively, *Afternoon Horrors* stories are about self-discovery and maturation. The PCs are discovering themselves and their place in the world. In young adult horror, this journey is usually precipitated by some supernatural event, forcing the PCs to reevaluate what they truly understand. In many cases, these narratives are framed as mysteries, but can also be heavily influenced by action/survival horror tropes. Most *Afternoon Horror* stories involve discovering secrets about the PCs' hometown, overcoming Threats (human and supernatural), and learning about themselves. Although similar to Sleeper-style campaigns, this reflection shifts the narrative emphasis slightly by pushing ***KULT: Divinity Lost***'s more unsettling themes into the background.

- Tear Down the PCs' Illusions to Reveal Unwanted Truths.
- Make the PCs' Lives Exciting, Even When It's Terrifying.
- Play to Discover How the PCs Change.

Tear Down the PCs' Illusions to Reveal Unwanted Truths

The *Afternoon Horrors* reflection focuses on personal awareness and self-discovery. The young PCs are maturing and setting aside childish things, even if they do not wish to. As such, the GM should strive to ***Tear Down the PCs' Illusions to Reveal Unwanted Truths***. The truths they once took for granted are eroded, tainted, and even violated, forcing them to reevaluate what they believe about themselves and their world. Maturation can be a painful, unpleasant experience, but can also be liberating and satisfying. The narrative's supernatural threats should expose and test the PCs' core beliefs, assailing them with betrayals and suffering, and reveal their peers as the monsters they are. Mostly, however, the GM should reveal the PCs' true selves – who they were and who they can become.

Example:

The PC's friend comes to school with bruises. They explain that they've been playing sports. Over time, they grow increasingly skittish, sullen, and standoffish. They cancel hangouts and sometimes cut classes. Later, they simply stop coming, yet no one seems to know why. Soon, the PCs discover the friend – and other 'unsavory' children – have been taken away for reeducation. One PC's father then announces they need to go to camp 'to save them from the devil.'

Make the PCs' Lives Exciting, Even When It's Terrifying

Although the stories can be dark and violent, *Afternoon Horrors* shifts the emphasis away from unrelenting dread toward scares and thrills. As such, the GM should ***Make the PCs' Lives Exciting, Even When It's Terrifying*** by injecting hints of whimsy into their narratives. In contrast, they must also avoid the grimmer aspects of ***KULT: Divinity Lost***, such as sexual and/or extreme violence. Although the PCs can suffer severe traumas, these events should remain off-screen or handled through fade-to-black. This subtle, yet important, concept adds an additional layer to the Horror Contract, allowing the GM and players to maintain a safe space during roleplay.

In short, much like campfire stories and haunted houses, *Afternoon Horrors* is exciting rather than bleak, frightening rather than fatalistic. Indeed, even at its darkest moments, the story should provide opportunities of hope – no matter how fleeting – until it resolves in a generally *positive* fashion.

Example:

The PCs' school is enshrouded by an impenetrable darkness. Anyone that goes outside disappears, leaving only horrific screams behind. The adults begin changing, their bodies transforming to match their darkest desires. The PCs find themselves trapped between these two relentless threats as they try to discover the source of this terrifying occurrence. They delve deeper into the school, experiencing more horrific events. However, they also become heroes, saving their classmates from terrible fates.

Play to Discover How the PCs Change

As mentioned earlier, young adult horror stories are about maturation and the journey to adulthood. Fearful and traumatic events PCs suffer serve as triggers for their transfiguration. As such, the GM and players should ***Play to Discover How the PCs Change***. This makes personal fears and weaknesses narratively important, as each PC should be tested and forced to examine who they are – and want to become. They're continually reminded of their failures and self-doubts, usually by the antagonists and the trials they endure.

Are they scarred by their experiences or do they grow stronger for them? What do they learn and how do these revelations change their perceptions? These journeys can become extremely personal and intense, even more so than the horrors around the PCs.

Example:

A PC has been aggressively pushed by their parents to do better, despite their achievements and good grades. At school, they're continually distrusted and envied for their abilities by fellow students, as well as being favored by the teachers. As such, they barely know who they are and what they're actually striving for, when everything they do only results in punishment. Finally, when they're able to overcome the horrors through their knowledge, they begin seeing the power of their own mind.

THERE ARE LIMITS, RESPECT THEM

One potentially difficult aspect of playing young PCs in **Afternoon Horrors** is sexual roleplay. Even if this isn't restricted in the *Horror Contract*, this subject matter should be handled with extreme care overall, especially its more negative and violent aspects. Although there can be sexual themes and intimacy, they should generally lead to a ***Fade to Black***. Establishing consent and limitations early on can help avoid any potential misunderstandings and complications for the GM and players. Be safe. Be respectful. And use common sense.

PRINCIPLES

Afternoon Horrors focuses on highly personalized settings and stories. The PCs are restricted by their ages and resources, as well as the social conventions placed upon them. These narrative limitations alter the overall tone and format of most stories. As young adults, the PCs also possess certain liberties that adult characters would not. The world itself should feel larger to them, filled with wonders and terrors alike. Depending on their personal circumstances, the PCs may be forced to grow up faster, sensing the wrongness in their lives. Similarly, they are more likely to be defined by their peers and elders, rather than their actual personalities. The following Principles can help the GM reflect these divergent elements in their narratives.

Create a Living, Breathing Microcosm

Afternoon Horrors stories typically transpire within fixed locations, such as small towns or urban neighborhoods. Despite this confined, narrative space, these locations feel like the PCs' *entire world*, as they cannot leave it. They are restrained by limitations of their youth, both socially and financially. The PCs will have likely grown up in the location. They recognize every neighbor's face, have heard all the local legends, and know each street and alleyway like the back of their hands. If they've just moved there, the new neighborhood can feel like a strange, threatening landscape to be explored and experienced. Their peers may see them as the suspicious Other, or may flock to them as a curiosity or novelty.

As such, in both cases, the GM needs to ***Create a Living, Breathing Microcosm***. Firstly, this makes the stories more real. Secondly, it narratively strengthens the sense of betrayal when the horrors finally reveal themselves, stripping away the PCs' beliefs and, thus, their innocence. What was once safe has become sinister. What was once known becomes alien. Their world will never be the same again. During the First Session, the group should define their location together, as well as outline areas important to the PCs. The more personalized their world is, the greater the personal connection.

Example:

The PCs have claimed the town library as their second home. Other kids rarely come to the old building, and bullies avoid it completely. The librarian is friendly and helpful, usually letting them do what they please. Beyond the reference stacks, they've discovered connected reading rooms that remain empty throughout the day, giving them extra privacy. On certain nights, the stacks change, moving into different configurations. Yet, the adults never seem to notice.

Allow Childhood Freedoms, But Impose Adult Limitations

In *Afternoon Horrors*, the PCs are young adults and allowed certain liberties. In some cases, they're provided anonymity, able to congregate and go where adults would be considered suspect. Depending on the setting and the PCs' backgrounds, they may have access to additional resources, such as the school library, computers, and pocket money.

In contrast, children do not possess adult freedoms and rights. They're continually under pressure to go to school, get good grades, and generally stay out of trouble. Adults aren't willing to believe their fanciful tales of monsters and other dimensions. They're not allowed to go out at night or skip classes. If they do – and are caught – they'll suffer real-life consequences. They may not have resources they require, such as money, transportation, or weapons. They may be denied entry into certain locations, such as businesses, universities, and industrial zones. Certain adults may immediately condemn and mistrust them, simply for being children.

As such the GM should ***Allow Childhood Freedoms, But Impose Adult Limitations***. This adds an additional layer to the narratives, as the PCs must successfully navigate both worlds to succeed. Reward players for creative and in-character roleplaying that helps reflect this Principle.

Example:

The PCs need to investigate the disappearance of their friend without raising suspicions. However, the farm house they suspect holds their friend is located outside of town. Of course, their parents won't allow them to travel there. Separately, they each tell their parents that the group is camping in their friend's backyard. Using this cover story, they sneak out undetected. They decide to trek through the backwoods to avoid being caught – unaware that this is the entity's actual hunting ground.

Use Adults to Reflect the Illusion's Power

The Illusion dims Humanity's perceptions as they grow older, deadening their minds and souls. However, children still retain their innocence and creativity, allowing them to more easily pierce the Illusion's veil. For them, the monster under the bed is real – and, in truth, it usually is. Furthermore, adults continually attempt to reinforce the Illusion's hold upon the young, forcing them to adhere to cultural and societal norms. This creates an adversarial relationship between adults and youths, as they literally perceive reality differently. The GM should play upon this conflict by ***Use Adults to Reflect the Illusion's Power***.

In *Afternoon Horrors*, the adult NPCs uphold the Principles of the Archons and Death Angels, reflecting them through their actions. When dealing with the PCs, they continually try to impose these ideals upon them. Their elders seek only to mold them into more obedient servants to the Illusion. At best, adults are condescending, opinionated, and uncompromising. At worst, they're calculating, cruel, and merciless. Even the most gentle and understanding parent seeks to do what's "best" for their child, dismissing their fanciful stories of angels and demons. This disconnection further reinforces the PCs' isolation and sense of helplessness – they truly are on their own.

Example:

After uncovering their coach's inhuman nature, a PC tries to enlist his parents' help in stopping her nefarious plans. At first, they laugh off his stories, telling him he's been playing too many scary video games. When he presses them, they grow increasingly angry at this nonsense. Later, they call the PC's coach to their home, forcing the PC to apologize for his poor behavior. When the parents aren't looking, the coach lets her mask fall, revealing the monstrosity beneath. She winks knowingly.

Infuse the PCs' Lives With Drama

Although PCs in *Afternoon Horrors* are young adults, this doesn't mean their lives are less complicated. Indeed, they may even be more so, as additional stresses are placed upon the PCs, well beyond the supernatural threats they'll face. Their lives are intimately entwined with family, friends, and school. To reflect these added pressures, the GM should ***Infuse the PCs' Lives With Drama***, both during the conversation and throughout downtime.

In the First Session, the GM and players incorporate their family and friends into the Intrigue Map, as well as develop interesting Relations to add personalized pressure. Some, if not all, of these NPCs should have intricate backgrounds and lives, which frequently intrude on the PCs. As much as possible, the GM should include interesting connections to the overall storyline, drawing the PCs deeper into the location's mysteries.

Example:

A PC's carefree parents once belonged to a cult, secretly devoted to Gaia. They broke away from the group, after the PC's mother became pregnant with her. However, the cult's membership frequently contacts the parents, urging them to return to the fold. Each time they do, this creates an uneasy tension in the house for days, as the parents bicker about their new lives. In turn, they take out their frustrations on the PC in different ways – one protective, one resentful – but never explain why.

Reinforce Stereotypes Throughout the Story

Another way the Illusion enforces its control over the PCs' lives is through cultural and societal labels. Even as they're attempting to discover their identity, the world around them continually influences these personal beliefs and self-doubts. As such, the GM should ***Reinforce Stereotypes Throughout Story***. Much like adult life, young adults are defined by their distinguishing traits, such as gender, race, and social status. They may also be categorized by their personality, such as boisterous or shy, and mental and physical traits. Even if these outward traits do not reflect the PC's inner nature, the world continually forces this role upon them. This adds additional pressures on the PCs, as they struggle to escape or succumb to the path chosen for them, not by them. For example, an athletic PC may be extremely smart, but their peers only care about their track and field abilities. When creating their character, players are encouraged to introduce these contrasts into their PC's lives.

Example:

A rebellious PC suffers from an unpleasant reputation, as their family is infamous in the community. They live on the wrong side of town and their older siblings and parents have frequent brushes with the authorities. Although this provides them an aura of fear they can use to intimidate their peers, they're also suspected of any wrongdoing in school. Teachers generally ignore them, thinking they're stupid by proxy or just trying to stir up trouble in class.

AFTERNOON HORROR ARCHETYPES

The Advocate: Compassionate and open-minded, the Advocate is always trying to bring people together and find mutually shared solutions.

The Athlete: Strong and dexterous, the Athlete excels at most physical tastes, devoting their lives to team sports and personal achievements.

The Brain: Intelligent and curious, the Brain devotes their life to learning and exploring new ideas and concepts.

The Bully: Angry and forceful, the Bully thrives on maintaining power over others, gaining respect through violence.

The Clown: Jesters and tricksters, the Clown tries to garner attention through humor, usually at the expense of others.

The Creator: Focused and inventive, the Creator devotes themselves to building and designing new things, be it artistic or practical.

The Computer Wiz: Smart and analytical, the Computer Wiz delight in new technologies and computers, spending much of their time with electronics and the virtual world.

The Dreamer: Flighty and imaginative, the Dreamer devotes themselves to dreaming up new and wonderful ideas and worlds. Yet, they rarely carry through – unlike the Creator.

The Geek: Shy and creative, the Geek devotes their daily life to their personal hobbies and interests, such as anime, books, games, and toys.

The Normal Kid: Mundane and practical, the Normal Kid generally fits into every cliche and group. Skilled at everything, masters of none – everyone likes the Normal Kid.

The Outsider: Secretive and brooding, the Outsider remains on the outskirts of society, using their anonymity and menace to their personal advantage.

The Paragon: Driven and superior, the Paragon excels at some skill or knowledge. They are held up by their peers as the perfect child, adding to their personal pressures.

The Popular Kid: Charismatic and attractive, the Popular Kid is respected and worshipped by all, commanding others with a smile and a word.

The Rebel: Defiant and unruly, the Rebel refuses to adhere to social norms, constantly fighting against authority.

Threats

Events	Places	Characters
See *Foundations of Dread*, p. 46 **Town Bullies Mark the Characters as Easy Prey** (Hunted/Conflict) **Town Elders Secretly Meeting at Library After Midnight** (Mystery/Community) **Discover Police Dumping Human Body** (Revelation/Lust) **Corporation Begins Threatening Local Businesses** (Rivalry/Avarice) **Befriends the Shunned Girl in Class** (Romance/Exclusion) **Teacher Disappears After Arguing With Parent Council** (Search/Power) **Invited to Rave Party in Woods** (Temptation/Compulsion) **Begins Showing Strange Mutations Upon Hitting Puberty** (Transmutation/Awakening)	Tree House, School (Private, Boarding, Public, etc.), Park, Playground, Abandoned House, Rich Home, House Trailer, Farmhouse, Spooky Shed, Covered Well, Secluded Reservoir, Forest, Brown Lands, Mall, Movie Theater, Convenience Store, Scary Street, Junkyard, Library, Storm Drain, Alleyway, Amusement Park, Farmer's Field	Parents, Teacher, Bully, Siblings, Angry Old Man/Lady, Police, Student, Popular Kid, Geeky Friend, Star Athlete, Class Clown, Brainiac, Librarian, janitor, Cool Kids, Scout Master, Troubled Kid, GrandParents, Aunt/Uncle, Store Clerk, Shop Owner, Guidance Counselor, Town Crazy, Stoner

Group	Monsters	Objects
Police, Teaching Staff, Parent's Committee, Neighborhood Watch, Boy/Girl Scouts, Rival Gang, Bullies, Sports Team, Student Council, After-School Club, Geeks, Popular Kids, Jocks, Art Class, Outsiders, Town Council, Religious Group, City Elders	Ghosts, Ghouls, Zombies, Thing Under the Bed, Werewolves, Vampires, Evil Children, Demons, Masked Killer, Thing in the Sewer, Tree spirits, Giant Bugs, Witches, Sorcerer, Trolls, Ogres, Scarecrow, Haunted Toys, Crooked Man	Bike, Board Game, Video Game, Baseball Cards, Sports Equipment, Computer, Shiny Stone, Toy Gun/Sword, Books, Flashlight, Cool Clothes, Heirloom, Cellphone, Art Supplies, Skateboard, Walkman, Stuffed Animal, Guitar, Switchblade

THE FICTION

One significant difference in *Afternoon Horrors* is the PCs themselves, specifically the Archetypes. Children lack the life experiences to properly fit into the roles in standard *KULT: Divinity Lost* games. However, the children are generally more Aware than most adult Sleepers. As such, the GM and players need to decide how the PCs are created.

Option One: Design the PC as detailed under the *Sleeper* Archetype (*KDL*, p. 86).

Option Two: Design new Archetypes (*KDL*, p. 87).

Option Three: Use a combination of Options 1 & 2.

Variants

Babes in Limbo: The PCs find themselves trapped in an alternative world, usually some grim version of a fairytale or fantasy adventure. They must survive the horrors of this new world, and find some way back to their own. Alternatively, they may be forced into this cruel and unusual realm through design, such as an experiment or punishment. Only together can they hope to escape their imposed damnation.

Poisoned Paradise: The PCs live in some perfect world, wanting for nothing in their idyllic homes. However, through chance or misfortune, they discover their entire world is based on a lie. They'll soon be sacrificed or condemned to fates worse than death. No one can be trusted, as every adult is working against them – even their parents. How can they survive this false paradise? What are they willing to do to escape it?

Fractured Memories: This complex campaign weaves both present and past together, where the players portray their characters as adults and children. Events unfold in both time-lines, revolving around specific stories that continue to resonate throughout their lives. Each session flips between the two timelines, revealing new memories and perceptions of events that shaped the PCs and who they became – usually revolving around their shared Dark Secrets.

[illegible]

THE KULT

NDIX:
TAROT

USING THE KULT TAROT

THE KULT TAROT DECK IS USED BY THE GAMEMASTER (GM) to perform readings, which help you create plots, antagonist, locations, and allies when planning a campaign. It can also be used during play when introducing new locations and characters in the heat of the moment.

To do this you will need to learn how to perform a tarot reading.

Text:
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Additional material:
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WAYS TO USE THE TAROT AS A GAMEMASTER

Fleshing out the Campaign

What is the lictor's intention? What is the building's backstory? Who does the cult serve? To what power is the artifact bound?

Sometimes you are left with many questions or the ideas you have seem to run in the same old tracks. The Tarot Cards can help flesh out your campaign by filling in the gaps, creating more depth to the characters, and developing hidden plots. This can preferably be done in the downtime moments when you work with the campaign or directly before or after the first session.

You may also develop completely new characters, locations, organizations, plots, creatures, and artifacts.

In the Spur of the Moment

When you have become comfortable with the tarot, you might want to use it during play. Have the deck next to you. When a situation, character, or being appears where you don't have a clear idea of what it could be, you can consult the tarot. Just draw a card and trust your instincts. What does it tell you? How is this particular element of your campaign associated with the card?

Foundation of a Story

It is possible to build a campaign setting or the basis for a short story using the Tarot Cards. By using them to create factions, Dark Secrets, and locations, you can further develop the game world your players are exploring.

BASIC GUIDELINES

Trust your Instincts

Tarot is not connected to logic. It is connected to the subconscious and your instincts. Each card is a key to unlock your mind. If you get a strong impression of a card's meaning without consulting its description – trust your instincts. There is no right or wrong interpretation. Experiment with the Tarot Cards and discover how they can be used to serve your story.

Learning the Tarot

The more you use the Tarot, the greater insight you will have into the cards, and the quicker you will be able to use them.

THE RITUAL OF THE TAROT

You should be in the right mindset when utilizing the Tarot Cards. Perceive this as a small ritual for coming into contact with your subconscious and unlocking the labyrinths of your mind.

First, create the physical space by setting the right atmosphere. Light a candle, play the right music in the background, and have a place where you can lay the cards and take notes.

Next, create the mental space by clearing your mind and taking a few deep breaths to help you focus on the reading you're about to do. Try to let go of any everyday stress you've been feeling, and focus your thoughts on the dark worlds of the KULT universe.

If you are not in the proper mood and moment, a Tarot Reading can be much harder. You want to create the right atmosphere.

The Insight you Seek

With the proper mindset, focus on what you want the cards to tell you.

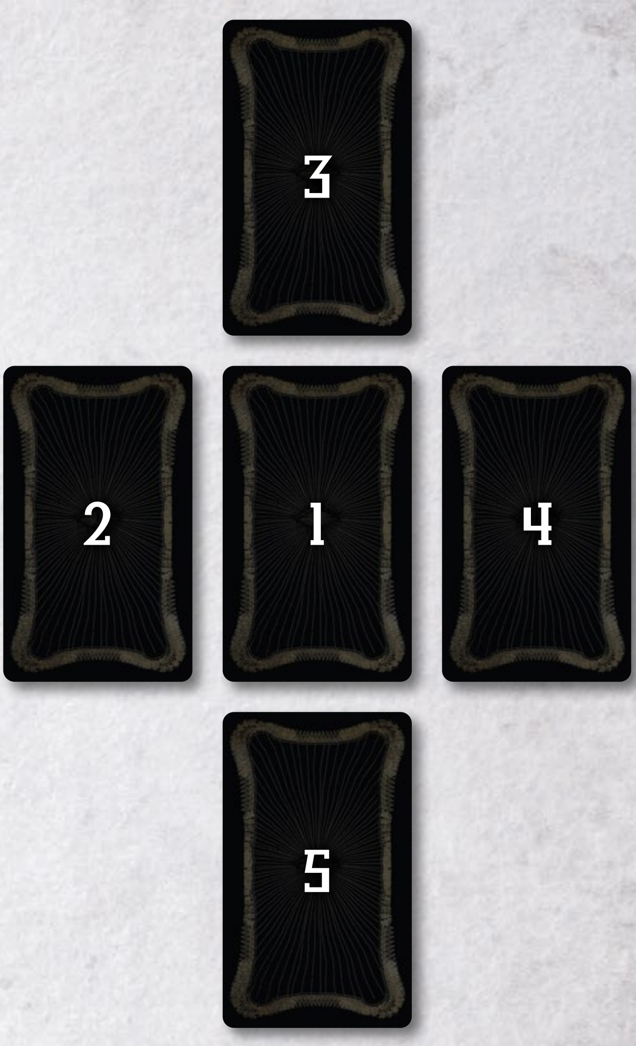
For example, you might feel that an important NPC in the campaign feels underdeveloped, and want to give it more depth. You may wish to discover what kind of location the cult has hidden in. Or you may want to understand what Higher Power lies behind the stranger who has arrived in town.

Check to make sure you're truly getting to the heart of the question, and opening yourself up to curiosity, empowerment, and manifestation.

Once you have formed your question, write it down so it remains clear in your mind.

Shuffle and Lay Out Five Cards

Shuffle the cards and focus on the question at hand. Think on the information that is already established in the story, but try to keep an open mind. Lay them face down in order to form the symbol below:



Begin with the card in the middle. This is the core card. Then add cards in the following order: one to the left of the core card, one at the top, one to the right, and one at the bottom. When complete, the five cards should form a star (*see above*).

The Story of the Cards

Each of the cards represents an answer to a specific question, which are discussed in the *Reading Templates* section below. Feel free to make up your own templates.

To perform the reading, turn the cards over in the proper order, going through them one by one. Flip the first card over and reflect upon its meaning. Look at the card and start describing to yourself what you see in the picture. What is happening in it, what story does it tell, and how does it relate to the question you asked. Pay close attention to your intuition and your gut feeling. Consult the information below about the specific card's meaning for deeper insight into what it symbolizes. But remember, don't let this description override your personal instincts. Your subconscious has the answers.

Once you have interpreted each individual card, look at all of the cards in the Tarot reading, as if they were pages of a story book. What's the story the cards are telling you? Weave this overall narrative together, and make your interpretation of them as a whole.

Reflect and Write Down

Write down the completed reading. Now, weave it into the game narrative.

Sometimes you will find that the reading makes little or no sense. There is no shame in redoing the reading. But give your original reading some more thought before discarding it.

READING TEMPLATES

Here are the templates of the things you can learn. If you only need to know a specific thing, you can just draw that particular card to get the answer. However, if you do the entire reading you will get a more complete picture.

INDIVIDUAL

Card 1: A core *Characteristic* of the individual.

Card 2: Something from the *Past* that shaped the individual.

Card 3: An *Ambition* that drives the individual.

Card 4: The individual's greatest *Weakness*.

Card 5: The individual's greatest *Strength*.

LOCATION

Card 1: The *Type* of location.

Card 2: Something about the location's *Past*.

Card 3: An unexpected or quirky *Trait*.

Card 4: A *Weakness* at the location, which might be exploited.

Card 5: Something that makes the location *Exceptional*.

CULT

Card 1: What Power/Ambition *Drives* the cult?

Card 2: An important thing about the cult's *History*.

Card 3: What does the cult wish to *Accomplish*?

Card 4: What is the cult's *Weakness*, such as enemies?

Card 5: What is the cult's unexpected *Resource*?

PLOT

Card 1: What is the *Power* behind the plot?

Card 2: What *Caused* the plot?

Card 3: What is the *Next Move* in the plot?

Card 4: What power *Opposes* the plot?

Card 5: What power *Supports* the plot?

CREATURE

Card 1: From what background does the creature *Originate*?

Card 2: From where can you find *Information* about the creature?

Card 3: What *Drives* the creature?

Card 4: What is the creature's *Weakness*?

Card 5: What is the creature's *Strength*?

ARTIFACT

Card 1: From where does the Artifact *Originate*?

Card 2: Who else is *Looking for It*?

Card 3: What are the *Dangers* in using it?

Card 4: What is its *Primary Power*?

Card 5: What is its *Secondary Power*?

Example reading

During the Downtime phase, Petter has introduced a new character to the story. An individual who came up during improvisation when the player characters took an unexpected route. They visited a bar at the edge of town, where they met Mr. Algstrand – a middle-aged man who sat in a corner, smoked a lot of cigarettes, and checked his cell phone all the time. This contact seemed to have an insight into the supernatural world and took an interest in the characters. The scene was very memorable and suspenseful and Petter realized that Mr. Algstrand could have an interesting role to play later in the story. But who is he? Looking at the Intrigue Map, there are no clear connections to any of the Powers at play. So Petter decides to consult the Tarot Cards.

He performs a five card read using the Individual template. This will reveal Mr. Algstrand's core *Characteristic*, something from his *Past*, his *Ambition*, his greatest *Weakness*, and his greatest *Strength*.

Petter shuffles the deck. And lays out the five cards. He then turns them one by one.

Card 1 – the Core Characteristic: Seven of Roses. This card represents *Prey*. Mr. Algstrand has a dangerous enemy of some sort. Or, perhaps, he has been the victim of something terrible. This is something that can be tied into several aspects of the story, or just be there to give the NPC more depth. Admittedly, Petter first thought of him as a quite powerful individual but having him be the prey actually makes it more interesting.

The next card is turned.

Card 2 – Something from the Past: Six of Eyes. This card represents *Rebellion*. Mr. Algstrand has rebelled against someone and/or something in his past. Something that might have given him a dangerous enemy. Petter doesn't want to draw too many conclusions yet. But already he gets a deeper insight in Mr Algstrand's nature.

The next card is turned.

Card 3 – An Ambition that Drives the Individual: Eight of Roses. This card represents *Obsession*. Driven by passion, Mr. Algstrand is clearly obsessed about something. Something he wants and needs and he strives to get.

The next card is turned.

Card 4 – The Individual's Greatest Weakness: Binah. Card 5 of the Major Arcana represents *Community and Family*. Petter already starts to realize that perhaps Mr Algstrand's Ambition (Obsession), and Weakness (Family) are the same thing. He is considered prey, after all; a victim. Has a family member been taken hostage or is in a dangerous situation, and he wants him or her back?

Petter finalizes the story about Mr. Algstrand by turning over the last card.

Card 5 – The Individual's Greatest Strength: Nine of Skulls. This card represents *Inferno*. And since it is his greatest strength, Petter decides that Mr Algstrand has made a pact with Inferno.

Summarizing the cards, taking it all in, Petter writes down short information about Mr. Algstrand: He rebelled against the servants of Netzach, a Power that features as one of the Influences in the story; specifically in the form of the lictor Miranda Stevenson and her following. He was once their servant, but broke free of their control. To punish him, they enlisted Algstrand's son. He is now Miranda's right hand man, and has no contact with his father. Mr. Algstrand desires to get him back and has therefore made a pact with Inferno. And now that the characters have come in his path, he will try to enlist their help in destroying Miranda Stevenson and getting his son back.

Petter could learn more about Algstrand's son by making another tarot reading for him. Or, perhaps, he could learn more about what kind of pact Mr. Algstrand has made, or flesh out Miranda Stevenson and her followers.

Readings During Play

There are many other ways to do readings. When you are comfortable with the cards and know them almost by heart, you can use them during actual play. You can draw a single card to answer a question. Be specific and ask questions in the style of:

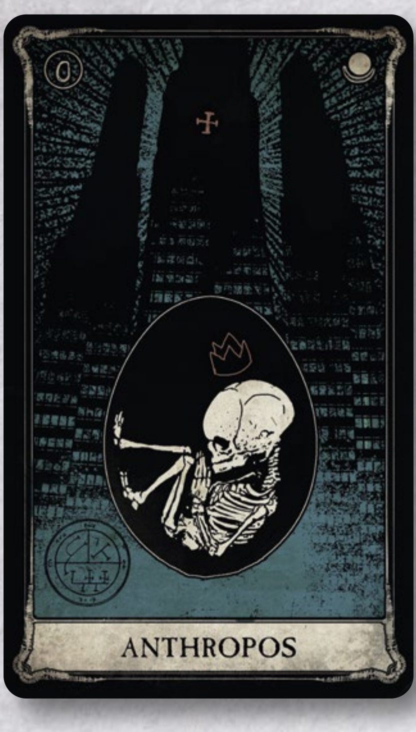
- Who is the person that lives in the hotel room next door?
- Where will the cult meet up?
- What item will be an important clue?
- What situation is taking place when the characters arrive at the industrial area?
- Who is the player character's contact? [Let the player draw the card]

The cards are keys to your subconscious, so experiment with them and explore their potential. But don't let them slow down the game.

THE MAJOR ARCANA

The Major Arcana represent the primary Principles that rule our imprisonment and are the very pillars of the Illusion.

0. Anthropos



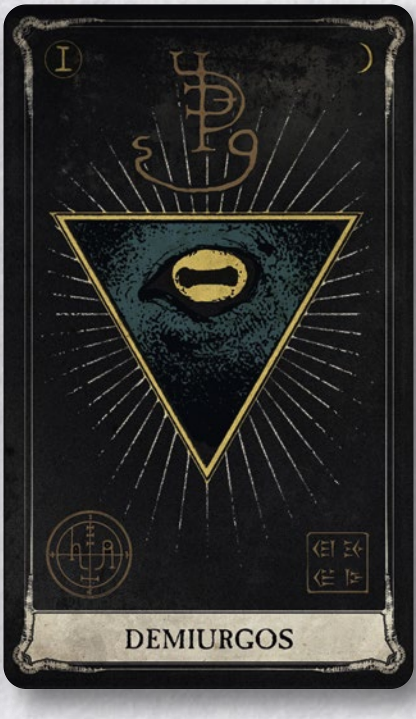
This card represents the Awakened Man. The Path to Awakening and the true divine origin of humanity.

The card reveals a connection to an Awakened Man, the path to Awakening, or of some shard of divinity that lies hidden deep within or is traceable back to a previous life.

This card is one of the top three most powerful cards in the whole Arcana, along with the ***Demiurge*** and ***Astaroth***, and always reveals something of great significance.

When this card is drawn, it might be suitable to draw an additional card and place on top of it to show how its power manifests itself.

1. Demiurge



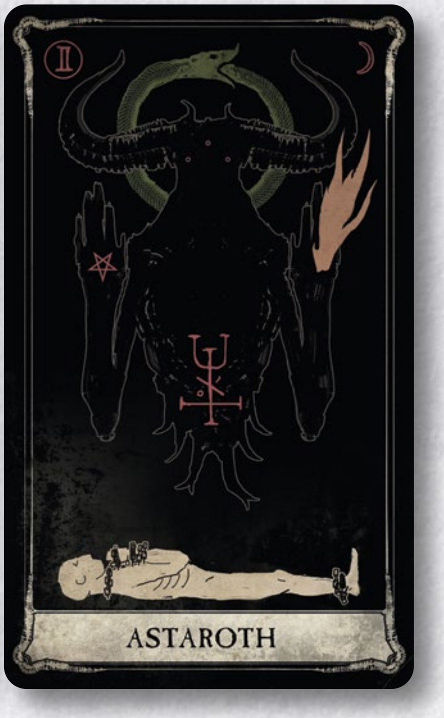
This card represents the Demiurge. The ruler who is now lost and was the Creator of Mankind's prison.

The card reveals a connection to the lost Demiurge, one of His servants, or perhaps to His Citadel that vanished. It has strong connections with: The power of Metropolis. The Endless City. The Citadels of the Archons. A Dead Civilization. Secret Paths. Beasts of Metropolis. Survivors. Stillness and Death. Hidden Secrets. A Great Power that is Sleeping. Dark Vaults. Watchers. Enslaved Gods. Temples. Dark streets. The Machinery of Death and Rebirth.

This card is one of the top three most powerful cards in the whole Arcana, along with ***Anthropos*** and ***Astaroth***, and always reveals something of great significance.

When this card is drawn, it might be suitable to draw an additional card and place on top of it to show how its power manifests itself.

2. Astaroth



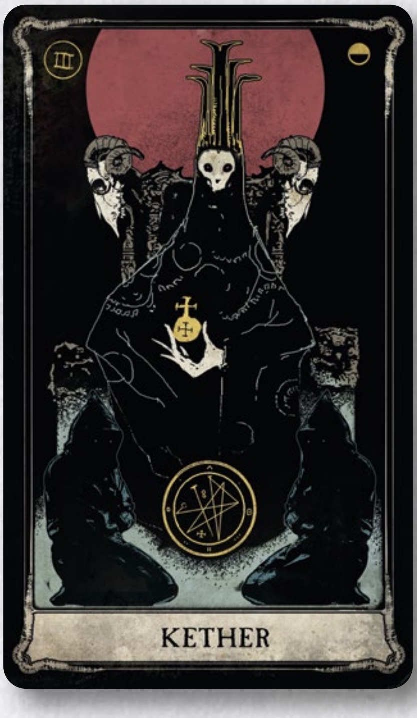
This card represents Astaroth. The Ruler of Inferno and Shadow of the Demiurge. The being who strives to become the new Demiurge by binding Elysium to Inferno rather than the Powers of Metropolis.

The cards tells of a connection directly to the Higher Power that is Astaroth and has strong connections with: The Will of Inferno. The Black Sun. The Citadels of the Death Angels. The Spiked Wheel. That Which Grows from Death. The Machinery of Death and Rebirth. Pulsating and Growing. Entwined Wills. Pathways and Gates to Shattered Worlds. Any Imaginable Suffering. Senseless Beauty. A Growing Power. Cracks in the Illusion. Wills Behind the Veil.

This card is one of the top three most powerful cards in the whole Arcana, along with ***Anthropos*** and the ***Demiurge***, and always reveals something of great significance.

When this card is drawn, it might be suitable to draw an additional card and place on top of it to show how its power manifests itself.

3. Kether



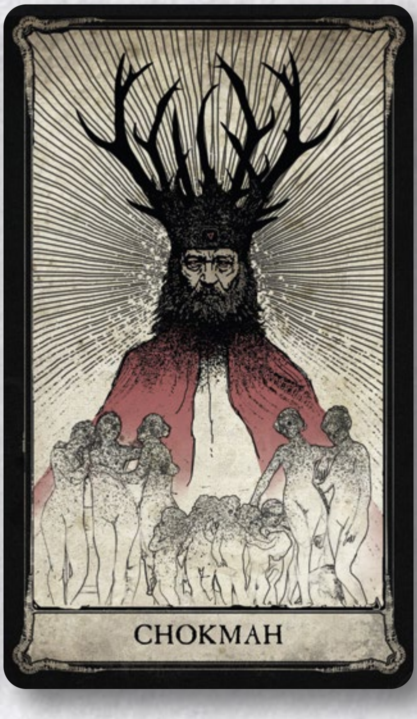
This card represents the Archon Kether and the Principle of Hierarchy.

Kether's influence manifests as hierarchical structures with masters and servants, widening class gaps, and an aristocracy with power and benefits.

Its influence is greatest in structures with a strong leader at their helm, including royal families, the leaders of the Catholic Church, corporate executives, and authoritarian countries such as China and North Korea.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

4. Chokmah



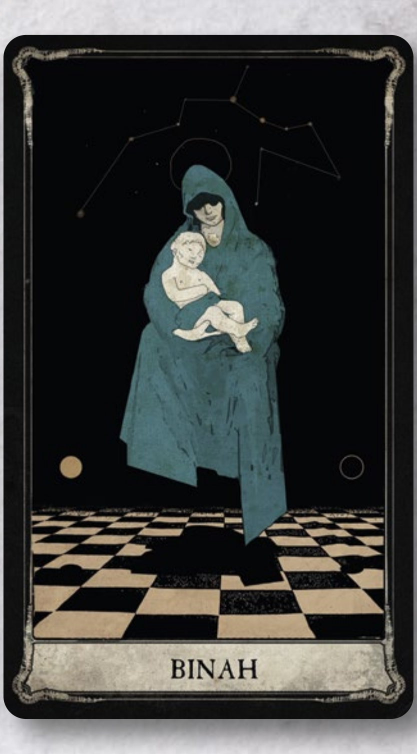
This card represents the Archon Chokmah and the Principle of Submission.

Chokmah's influence manifests as the submission to religious leaders, martyrdom, fanaticism, theocratic rule, and dogmatism. It exists virtually everywhere religion can be found.

Chokmah's servants have a strong influence in the Middle East and many imams and rabbis are lictors. The Archon also has significant influence over the Catholic Church.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

5. Binah



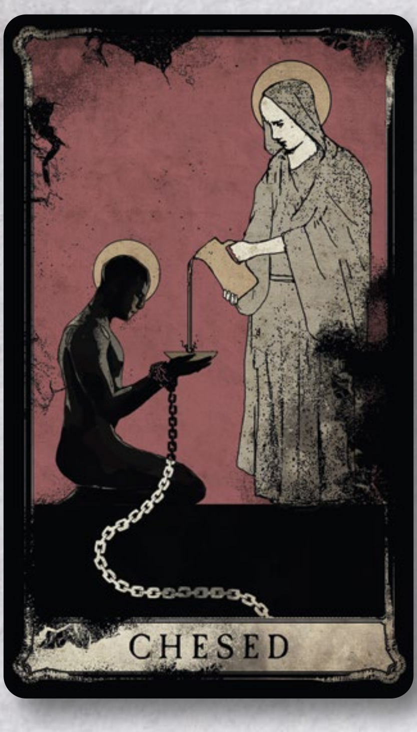
This card represents the Archon Binah and the Principle of Community.

Binah's influence manifests as the family's power over the individual, mistrust of the state and other authorities outside of the family, strengthened traditions, and the distrust of strangers.

Her grip is strong anywhere family ties are at their peak, including the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, China, and the southern United States. Her influence is once again growing in Russia. Among the Roma, Binah is a goddess who is worshipped and revered.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

6. Chesed



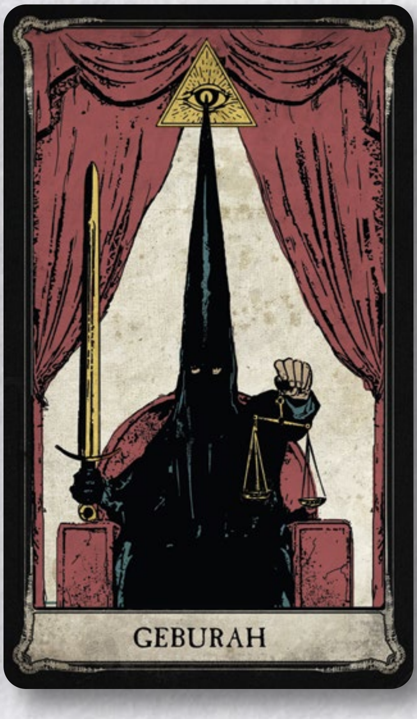
This card represents the Archon Chesed and the Principle of Safety.

Chesed's influence manifests as people's longing for safety, the desire to feel comfortable and safe from dangers threatening you, encouraging friendly behavior, and the sense that you are protected against the unknown and dangerous.

Once, Chesed's servants were to be found amid generous noblemen, monasteries, wise women of the forest, doctors who did anything to find cures for diseases, aid organizations, benevolent charities, and warm-hearted people. Now, his power has faded.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

7. Geburah



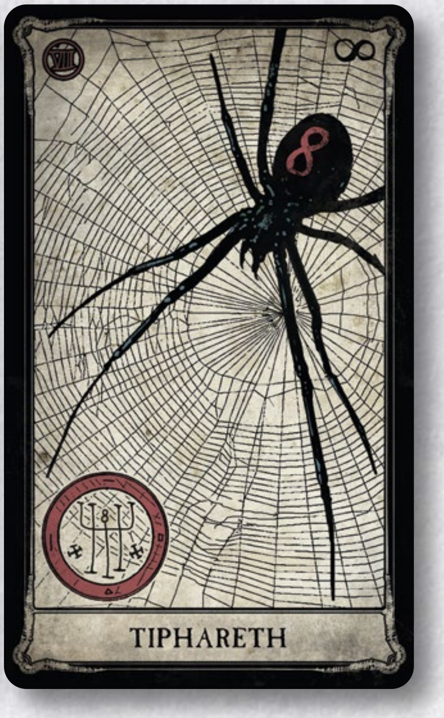
This card represents the Archon Geburah and the Principle of Law.

Geburah's influence generates bureaucratic institutions, stricter laws, increased policing, and societal control over its citizenry. Those so influenced yield to increased control, typically out of their fear of chaos.

The Archon has a strong influence over legal systems of every kind. Lictors are often judges, chiefs of police, or lawyers. They have a great presence anywhere bureaucracy is strong, and where laws and rules are used to control people.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

8. Tiphareth



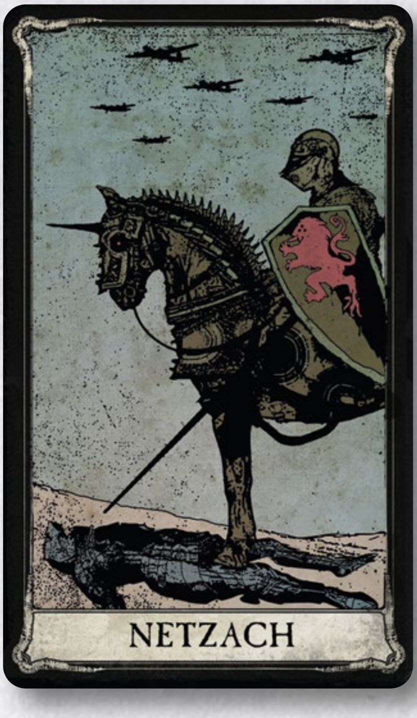
This card represents the Archon Tiphareth and the Principle of Allure.

Tiphareth's influence incites a manic craving for beauty and affirmation, which must be fulfilled by any means necessary. Celebrities are worshipped as prophets, the mediocre waste their days imbibing the internet and television shows, and despise and ignore anyone who doesn't meet the social 'norms.'

Her influence is great everywhere in society, but especially via the media, advertising, and the Internet.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

9. Netzach.



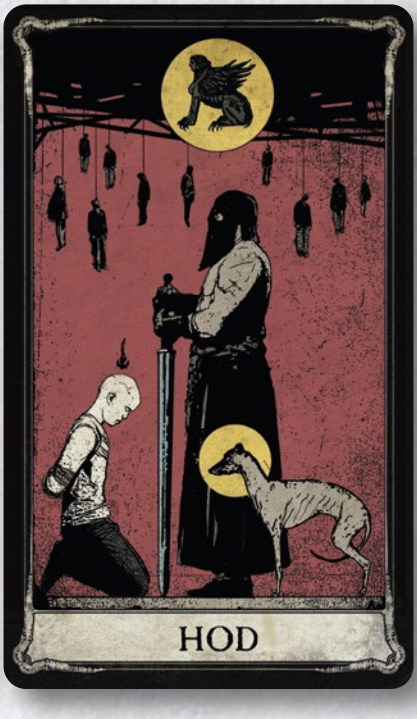
This card represents the Archon Netzach and the Principle of Victory.

Netzach's influence strengthens patriotism and nationalism, unites societies against a common enemy, and feeds the *us-versus-them* mentality. The righteous obliterate all that threaten them, strengthen their military, justify their violence in the name of the Greater Good, and incite people to arm themselves.

His influence is strongest within the military, military academies, private armies, manufacturers of weapons, lobbyists, and mercenaries. Has his largest influence in North America.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

10. Hod



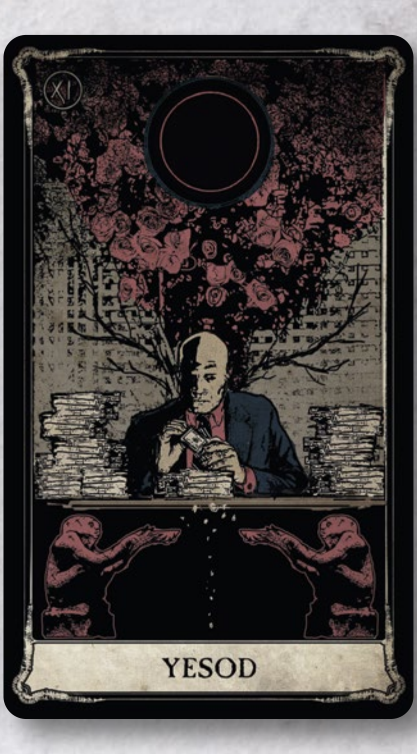
This card represents the Archon Hod and the Principle of Honor.

Hod's influence conflates honor with prestige, elevates one's status among others above all else, and sets the law aside in favor of personal vendettas. Expecting admiration for their adherence to their inflexible values, the honor-bound ruthlessly ostracize any who have brought shame upon themselves by failing to uphold their honor and fulfil the many duties it demands.

The Principle is strongest in areas and communities where the honor culture still is very dominant, including the Middle East and countries in Asia, such as India, Pakistan, and Japan. In large parts of North Africa, Hod's servants and ideology are also still strong, even though these traditions have started to be questioned.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

11. Yesod



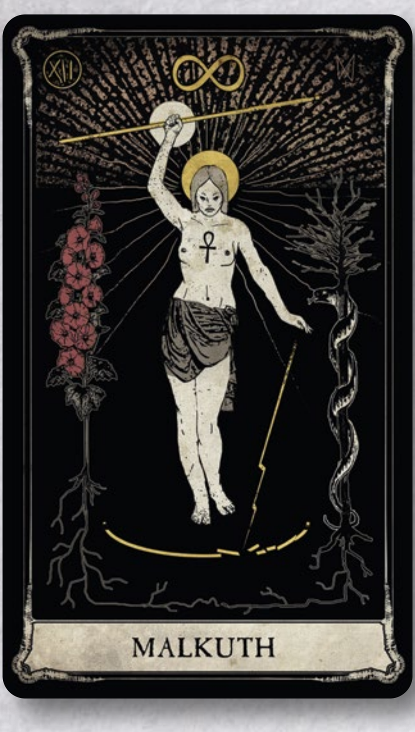
This card represents the Archon Yesod and the Principle of Avarice.

Yesod influences society through greed, capitalism, economics, consumer frenzy, and increased corporate power, as well as by promoting the admiration and respect of wealth as a sign of personal intelligence and ambition. It encourages contempt for the poverty-stricken, who are associated with laziness and stupidity, and supports the dismantling of social welfare institutions.

The Archon has control over large parts of the Western world and nowadays also China.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

12. Malkuth



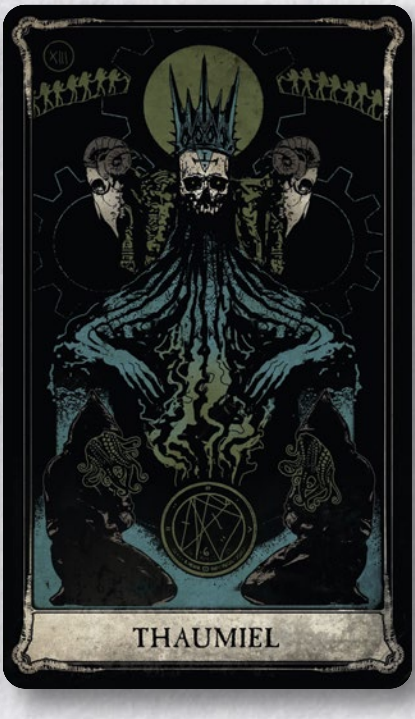
This card represents the Archon Malkuth and the Principle of Awakening. (previously: Conformity)

Malkuth's influence strives to free people from their prison by shattering the Illusion to reveal other dimensions, and inspiring people to question the nature of society and the fabric of reality. She inspires magicians and scientists to experiment with the unknown and search for their lost divinity. (Previously, Malkuth represented Conformity and the natural cycles we tend to see in our world and our prison.)

Malkuth has her strongest influence among magicians and scientists. Europe is her primary stronghold, as well as regions of North America and Asia. During the Islamic Enlightenment, she had followers throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Archon and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

13. Thaumiel



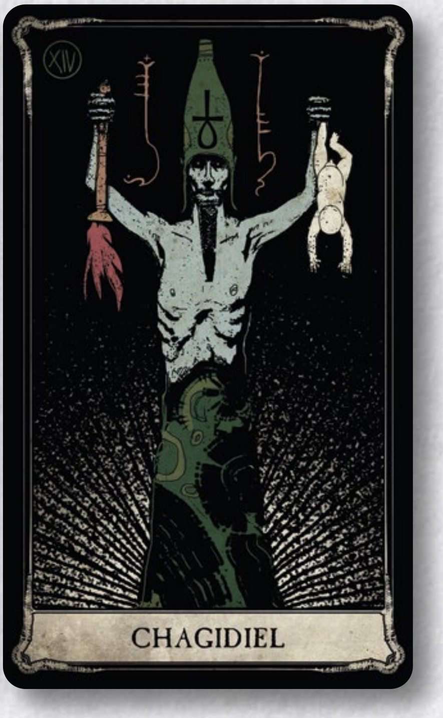
This card represents the Death Angel Thaumiel and the Principle of Power.

Thaumiel's influence manifests as a hunger for power, corruption, dictatorship, fascism, intrigue, insurrection, oppression, ruthlessness and totalitarian rule – a breakdown of solidarity and trust.

Thaumiel's Principle is strongest where there are hierarchies and power structures with clear rifts. Governments undergoing political upheaval, the entertainment business, the world of sports, organized crime, neo-nazi organizations, Wall Street and other stock exchanges, major corporations, and so on down to street gangs and school classes.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

14. Chagidiel



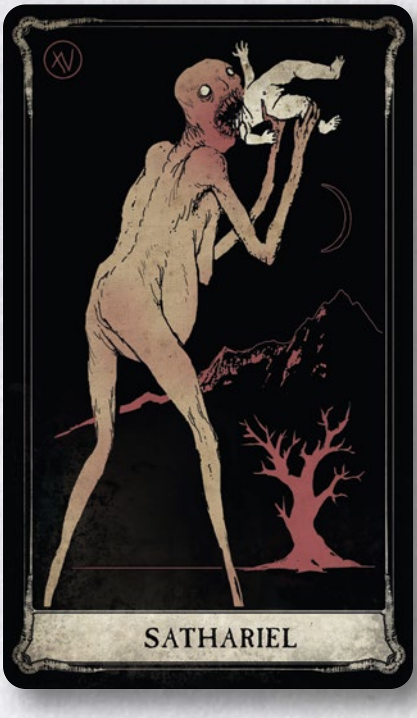
This card represents the Death Angel Chagidiel and the Principle of Abuse.

Chagidiel's influence takes shape in the violation of children, the perversion of adult love and care, forgotten and lost children, homeless street kids, and the degradation and ruination of school systems.

The Death Angel's strongest influence is over nuclear families, but he is also active within pedophile networks, orphanages, youth centers, trafficking rings, illegal porn sites, and various cults and religious organizations all over the world.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

15. Sathariel



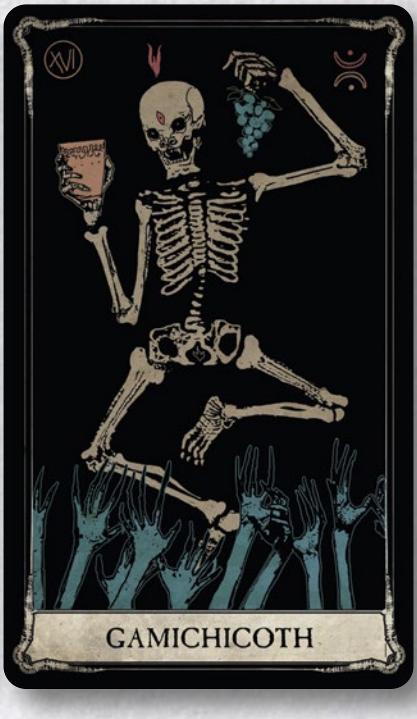
This card represents the Death Angel Sathariel and the Principle of Exclusion.

Satahariel's influence incites self-loathing, loneliness, hopelessness, contempt for 'normals,' self-destruction, anxiety, depression, suicide, school shootings and massacres, and communities of outsiders inspiring each other to commit destructive actions.

Sathariel's corruptive will seeks out those who feel rejected and those who feel their lives are devoid of meaning. These can be found everywhere.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

16. Gamichicoth



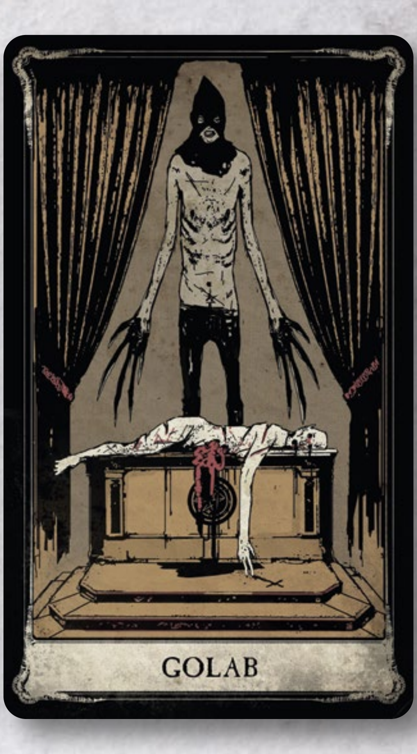
This card represents the Death Angel Gamichicoth and the Principle of Fear.

Gamichicoth's influence awakens fear of 'the Other' by escalating distrust and blaming various ethnic groups, religions, or political dissidents for society's problems. False narratives are created and distributed through news media, rumors, and manipulated visual evidence, while heralds whisper how all our concerns would dissipate if only 'the Others' were punished or disappeared.

The Death Angels influence is strongest within the middle class and in regions with conservative values. The Ku Klux Klan, fanatic pro-lifers, concerned parents' groups, paramilitary forces committing genocide, neo-fascists of all types, and patriarchal structures who fear liberal values will corrupt young people are all at risk of falling under this Death Angel's influence.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

17. Golab



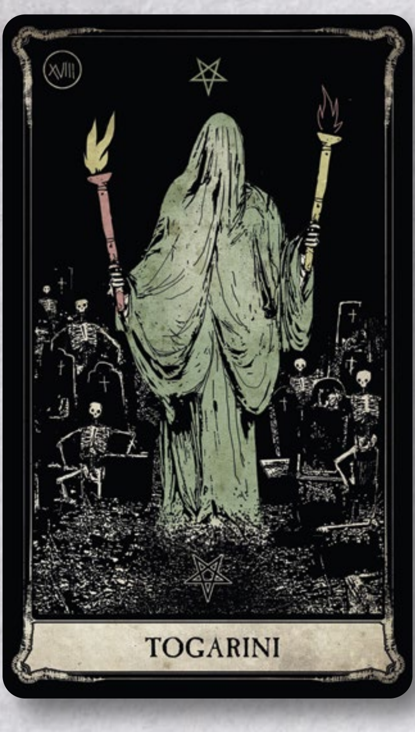
This card represents the Death Angel Golab the Principle of Torment.

Golab's influence increases societal sadism, giving people pleasure from inflicting pain on others or by being subjected to torment themselves. Criminals are tortured in public, people carry out their most sadistic ideas unto both willing and unwilling subjects in obscure safe houses, while murderers leave trails of mutilated bodies.

Golab's presence is strongest wherever sadistic assaults are committed against humans. He is found in organized crime, the military, terrorist groups, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

18. Togarini



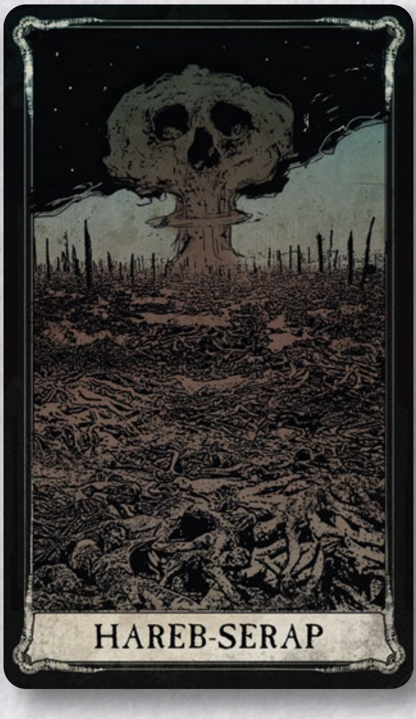
This card represents the Death Angel Togarini and the Principle of Compulsion.

Togarini's influence increases the manic creativity that distorts reality, tearing beauty asunder. Insane artwork opens portals to Inferno, magicians experiment at the border of life and death, and death itself acts erratically – souls binding themselves into rotting corpses, or haunting the living as distorted spectres.

The Death Angel's influence is strongest among artists, magicians, body modifiers, and the senses and imagination enchanted by the dark and grotesque.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

19. Hareb-Serap



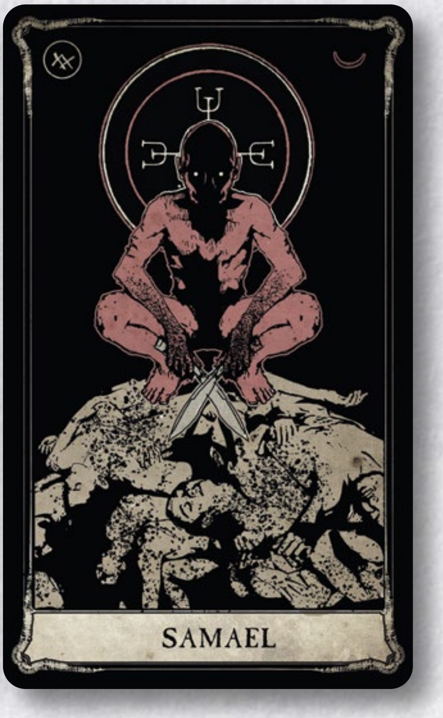
This card represents the Death Angel Hareb-Serap and the Principle of Conflict.

Hareb-Serap's influence propagates uncontrollable rage, bloodlust, and senseless violence. Gangs have shootouts in public places, police beat suspects to death, hooligans storm arenas, lynch mobs tear their targets to pieces, harmless conflicts escalate into bloody fistfights, and 'normal' people teeter on the brink of explosive outbursts at all times.

The Death Angel's greatest influence is over war zones, gang territories, the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia. Many of his servants are soldiers or gang members, but Hareb-Serap's Principle can be stirred in all of us.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

20. Samael



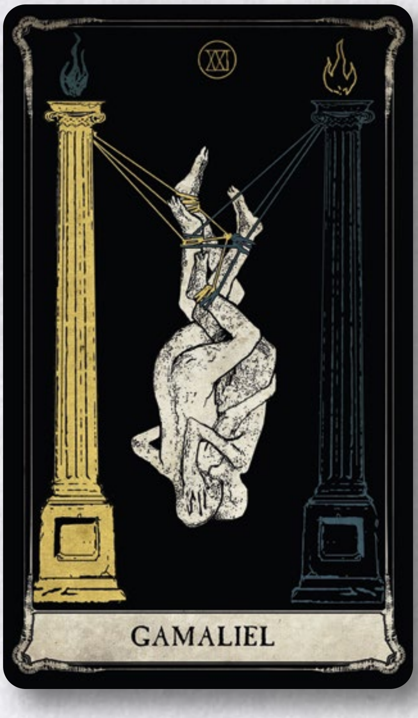
This card represents the Death Angel Samael and the Principle of Vengeance.

Samael's influence strengthens paranoia, vindictiveness, and obsession with injustices, while perpetrators take brutal revenge for nonexistent affronts, jealous partners murder their loved ones for imagined betrayals, and terrorists exact gory retribution upon their foes.

The Death Angel has a strong influence over individuals with a strong lust for vengeance, but also in organizations with strong codes of honor and a willingness to use violence to get what they want, such as the mafia, gangs, terrorist organizations, and certain cults. Magicians occasionally seek insight into Samael's dark brilliance.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

21. Gamaliel



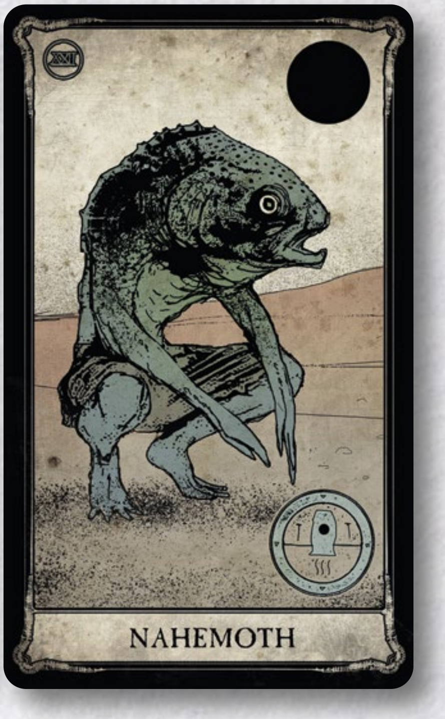
This card represents the Death Angel Gamaliel and the Principle of Lust.

Gamaliel influences society towards hypersexualization and objectification, where crowds commit gang rape, victims are forced into prostitution, pornography becomes increasingly hardcore and perverted, and celebrants gather in clubs and secret societies for macabre orgies, and people embrace mindless desires with no consideration of the consequences of their actions.

The Death Angel has a strong influence over the pornography business, webcam shows, brothels, rapists, and, deep down, virtually everyone to some degree.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

22. Nahemoth



This card represents the Death Angel Nahemoth and the Principle of Discord.

Nahemoth's influence deforms the natural world, turning it dangerous and threatening, expressed as forest fires, oil spills, poisoned streams and groundwater, misshapen animal life, violent storms, cold snaps, heat waves, torrential rains, earthquakes, tsunamis, cannibal tribes, disfigured fetuses, and baleful eclipses. She turns the world upside down, instilling fear by destroying conformity and normalcy.

Her influence is strongest in regions where people fear and venerate nature, as well as places with chemical spills, radioactive zones, open sewers, strip mines, industrial zones, and rubbish dumps.

The card shows a connection or opposition to the Death Angel and/or its Principle. The bond might be in the present, the past, or something that is about to happen.

THE MINOR ARCANA

The Minor Arcana represent aspects of the Illusion and our prison.

Skulls

This suit represents Death as a breakthrough to the other side, as well as the mortal destruction that binds us to our flesh. It is strongly connected to both Metropolis and the Archons, as well as to Inferno and the Death Angels.

1. METROPOLIS

Metropolis represents mankind's ancestral home, the Eternal City and the very core of the Demiurge's Machinery.

Individual: Mourning widow. Janitor who works in an empty factory. Desperate architect. Strict and unimaginative manager.

Location: Funeral chapel. Ruined city. Labyrinth of alleyways. The Abyss. The Machine City. The Citadels.

Organization: Section 11. Prophets of the Third Temple. Flakchatters.

Situation: A feeling of greatness. A slow but lethal disease. Perceiving the shadow of the Creator. An inheritance is waiting.

Creature: Servant of now-destroyed Power. Angels of the Heavenly Choirs. Beasts of Metropolis.

Item: Painting depicting a great Citadel. A coffin in black oak. An urn filled with ashes. A ring of keys. Obituary for long dead patriarch.

2. FORGETFULNESS

Forgetfulness represents that which has faded from memory. It is strongly connected to the cycle of rebirth and the Oubliettes of Forgetfulness in Metropolis.

Individual: Hypnotist. Senior citizen. Careless bookkeeper. Trauma victim. Inattentive babysitter. Distracted priest. Sloppy surgeon.

Location: Oubliette of Forgetfulness. Locked vault. Old peoples home. Ghost town. Gas station at the edge of nowhere.

Organization: Online forum that discusses reincarnation. Servants to an old noble family.

Situation: Traumatic event. Alzheimer's. Dementia. Memory loss. Manipulated minds. Past lives. Electric shocks.

Creature: Lives on stolen memories. Something from a past life. Angel that seeks a soul that is lost.

Item: Notebook. Old letters. Drugs. Buried. An equation that lacks the last numbers. Lobotomization equipment. Boxes in the attic.

3. REMNANTS

Remnants represents that which has been left behind after death, destruction, or transition.

Individual: Pragmatic archaeologist. Eccentric descendant. Soldier from a dissolved military unit. Hobo living in the junkyard.

Location: Ruins from ancient times. Abandoned family home. Shipwreck on the bottom of the sea.

Organization: Legal firm handling inheritances. Ancestor cult.

Situation: Family secrets. Last in a bloodline. Surviving child that no one wanted. Becoming alone in the world. Discovering secrets of one's past.

Creature: Fallen Angels. *Broken* creatures. Azghouls.

Item: Last page in a book. A distorted message on a cassette tape. Automated distress signal. Strange machinery with parts missing.

4. SPIRIT

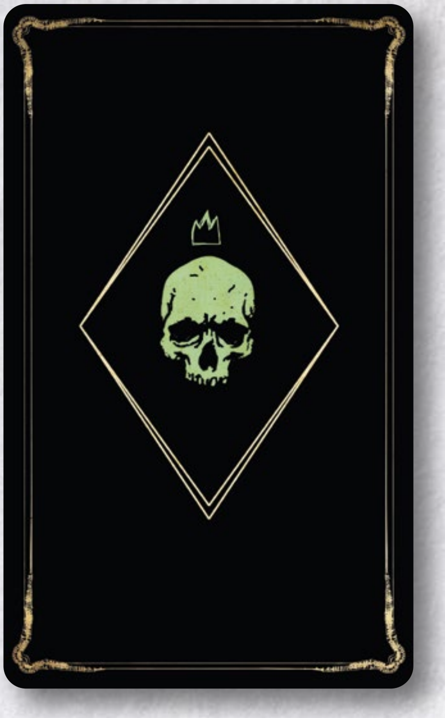
Spirit represents the psyche, the immaterial essence and the machinery that chains the divine soul.

Individual: Sophisticated medium with a rich clientele. Girl in the suburb who sees "ghosts." Scientist who tries to photograph the spirit world. Conjurer of spirits living in an abandoned train. Possessed child kept tied to the bed.

Location: The still and cold sea. Home of a serial killer where the bodies are hidden in the walls. Mire cloaked in white mist. Old lighthouse on a small island.

Organization: Online show that investigates paranormal phenomena.

Situation: Legend of a person that is whispered in the projects. Song calling from Achlys in the Underworld.



Creature: Wraiths and Phantoms. A Human Soul. Psyphago.

Item: Deck of stained tarot cards. Doll possessed by a spirit. Ouija board stained with beer and blood. Pack of old letters in French.

5. TRANSITION

Transition represents the crossing from life to death or into another form of existence.

Individual: Methodical and well prepared hitman. Executioner who barely can keep it together. Trauma victim hovering between life and death. Nurse with a god complex. Pornstar with an asphyxiation fetish. Seductive death magician.

Location: Abortion clinic. A hidden door in a tomb. Secret gate that leads to the city of the dead. Desolated slaughterhouse. Retirement home.

Organization: Death squad. Scientific organization trying to monitor the moment of death.

Situation: Mother dying in childbirth.

Creature: Borderliner. Creature that exists between life and death.

Item: Homemade biological weapon. Syringe with embalming fluid. Automated external defibrillator with one charge left. Fetus preserved in alcohol that now and again twitches. Vial with seed spilled during the moment of death.

6. FLESH

Flesh represents the body as a shell after death or as a prison of a soul that should have been released.

Individual: Morbid surgeon that takes trophies. Insane young man that keeps the body of his dead father tied to a bed in the attic. Restrained undertaker with deviant sexual urges. Lobotomized girl kept at the basement of a brothel.

Location: Morgue in stainless steel where the antiseptic smell barely can douse out the stench of rot. Mass graves outside of a small town. Medical museum.

Organization: Society of death magicians. Cannibal cult in the countryside.

Situation: Severe case of leprosy. The dead come to life. Forced to eat human flesh. Cannibalism.

Creature: Damned legionnaires.

Item: Deformed body that is stitched and melted together. Tome bound with human skin. Stolen organs in a box filled with ice. Box of scalpels and surgical knives.

7. WEAPON

Weapon represents the tool that brings death. That which brings forth a transition through violence.

Individual: Vigilante in the suburbs armed with silenced pistol. Russian mafia enforcer. Elite sniper that takes pride in his work. Murderer who wants to get close and personal with the knife.

Location: Room with an electric chair. War memorial. Weapon storage. Military headquarters.

Organization: Arms dealers. Military special forces. Mercenary group. Violent gang.

Situation: Lynch mob armed with machetes and rifles. Drive-by shooting. Armed robbery. Attempted assassination. Ambush.

Creature: Creature that feeds on violence and suffering.

Item: Sharp blade. Ingram Mac-11 machine pistol. Video clips of executions and lethal accidents. Old video cassette with snuff porn. Pack of cigarettes. Hand grenade from WWII. Nuclear codes printed out from a dot matrix printer. Crime scene photos with hidden messages.

8. SUFFERING

Suffering represents the pain that comes with death and the cleansing of the soul. It is strongly connected to the cycle of rebirth and the Oubliettes of Suffering in Inferno.

Individual: Self mutilating prophet. Professional dominatrix. Military interrogation expert. Religious flagellant.

Location: Purgatory that creates a bridge between Elysium and Inferno. Oubliettes of Suffering. Soundproof interrogation room. Members-only BDSM club. Hidden cellar entrance. Medieval torture chamber.

Organization: Secret anti-terrorist organization. Cult that worships Golab.

Situation: Painful bone cancer. Secrets within the Family. Video tape of a young child getting skinned alive. Horrible flashbacks.

Creature: Purgatides. Nepharites. Razides.

Item: Crown of thorns made of barbed wire. Waterboarding equipment. Rusty spikes. Shackles with runes carved into them.

9. INFERNO

Inferno represents the shadow of Metropolis, the many hells and Citadels and the realm from which the will of Astaroth flows.

Individual: Tattoo artist who binds the clients to Inferno. Charismatic cult leader who hands out razor blades. Heroin addict who has learned to walk between worlds. Violent fanatic who catches glimpses of Inferno.

Location: Citadel of Astaroth. The ten Citadels of the Death Angels. Labyrinth with torture chambers. A gate between Elysium and Inferno.

Organization: Suicide cult seeking escape from the world.

Situation: Child drenched in oil and blood is placed on the steps of a monastery. Secret whispered on the death bed. Lyrics of a black metal band invoke the powers of hell.

Creature: Nepharite. Incarnate of Astaroth.

Item: Old key that can open gates between world. LP-record that plays a haunting tune. Matchstick box filled with human teeth. "Forgive me" written in blood on a piece of paper.

Roses

The rose is a symbol of Passion, the blinding desire that binds or liberates us. It relates to our sexuality. It is strongly connected to the primal forces of Gaia.

1. GAIA

Gaia is the Untamed Wilderness, that which cannot be controlled, the primal hunger and raw emotions.

Individual: Madman more animal than man. Neo-pagan nature worshiper. Native shaman who demands a sacrifice.

Location: Borderland to Gaia. An overgrown house. Depth of the wilds. An animal nest.

Organization: Cult worshiping the untamed wilderness.

Situation: Savage cannibalism. Overtaken by emotions. The stronger kills the weaker. Nature overtakes civilization. Losing control in a wild rapture. A body that changes and twists into something bestial.

Creature: Enwildened god. Sentinel.

Item: Map that leads into the wild. Tribal figurine carved from bone. A human skull on a pole. Rotting carcass crawling with worms.

2. BIRTH

Birth represents what comes out of passion, the start of something new, a soul merged into flesh.

Individual: Strict midwife. Depressed mother. Newborn in an incubator. Newborn baby. Proud godfather. Teenage parents. Desperate baby kidnapper.

Location: Run-down maternity ward. Orphanage on the countryside. Narrow tunnel.

Organization: Surrogate mother agency. Adoption center.

Situation: Child is born. Dawn of a new day. New age of responsibility. Family bond. Adoption. Stillborn baby. Paternity test.

Creature: Strange offspring. Gynachid.

Item: Bottle of mothers milk mixed with blood. Empty baby crib. Sharp objects at the bottom of a box of baby clothes.

3. SURVIVAL

Survival represents the will to go on against all odds, the survival of the fittest and conquering difficulties by pure iron will.

Individual: Hillbilly survivalist with an iron will. Special forces soldier. Battered housewife. Child soldier. Hardened veteran.

Location: The depths of the wild. War zone. Rough neighborhood. Abusive foster-home. Secret bunker filled with food and equipment.

Organization: Survivalist network. Mercenary group. Urban explorers.

Situation: Lost in the wilderness. A prize on your head. Surrender to someone that is stronger. Showing dominance. Desperate act of cannibalism.

Creature: Being from the depths of Gaia.

Item: Door chain. Field rations. Map where secret trails are marked out. Blood stained compass.

4. GROWTH

Growth represents things that gain power and expand, be it will, body, or nature.

Individual: Boy with physical deformations. Dedicated bodybuilder. Grotesquely obese woman.

Location: Place overtaken by nature. Barely funded laboratory. Room with mold ceiling and walls. Gym in the suburbs. Plowed fields.

Organization: Fertility clinic. Expansionist government or company. Association organizing bodybuilding contests.

Situation: An idea grows into an obsession. Genetic mutation. Friendship grows to untamed desire. Child that reaches puberty. Cancer that spreads through the body.

Creature: Lilith/Darthea. Animal mutated by Gaia.

Item: Syringe with steroids. Seed embedded in black earth. Fertilized egg. Self help book.

5. PREDATOR

Predator represents the hunter, the one that is hungry and preys on the weak.

Individual: Influential film mogul. Manipulative femme fatale. Impulsive serial killer. Serial rapist who lives in an unknowing family. Ruthless paparazzi. Aggressive CEO. Online profile with the nickname “Alpha_Male.” Conjurer of Passion.

Location: Seedy hotel close to the red light district. Cabin deep in the wild. Barn where you skin animals.

Organization: Cult celebrating murder. Big game hunting society.

Situation: Preys on the weak. Stalking someone in the night. Seduction. Attack from an ambush. Hidden motif.

Creature: Nosferatu that hunts from the shadows. A creature born out of Passion.

Item: Red lipstick. Stiletto knife. Condoms and lube. Night-vision goggles. Knock out drug. Makeup mirror. Limousine with loyal driver.

6. SWARM

Swarm represents a gathering, a collective mind, a mob swallowed by passion and acting as one.

Individual: Devoted follower. Animal trainer. Fisherman with a dark secret. Agitated football supporter.

Location: Square and streets. Mosquito infested marshlands. Youth camp. Projects in the suburbs. Cattle ranch.

Organization: Football supporters. Religious sect. Union Activists.

Situation: Goes with the Flow. Sacrifice for the best of the Collective. Collective punishment. Gathering of people. Congested traffic during rush hour. A group sharing the same mindset. Angry mob on social media. People traveling in collective traffic.

Creature: Pack of wolves. Cockroaches. Zeloths.

Item: Jar of honey. Dried ants in a matchstick box. Locust broach in bronze.

7. PREY

Prey represents the victim of passion or be the target for some enemy or dangerous situation.

Individual: Celebrity terrorized by a ruthless stalker. Blackmailed family man. Wanted fugitive. Online scapegoat. Gullible teenager. Doll-like altar boy. Trafficking victim.

Location: Hidden cell in the basement of a house. Empty streets at night. Safe house for women. Old forest road.

Organization: Support group for survivors of rape and sexual abuse.

Situation: Lured into a trap. Blackmailed into obedience. Stalked by someone or something.

Creature: Creature of Passion. Children of the Night.

Item: Crying and begging on a voice recording. Stolen passport. Pistol in a handbag. Incriminating video tape.

8. OBSESSION

Obsession represents the grip when passion has gotten hold of you and you cannot control it but are a victim to its influence.

Individual: Voyeuristic photographer. Eccentric art collector. Depressed ex husband. Unbearable narcissist.

Location: Classy strip club. Music venue. Obscure porn site.

Organization: Boy band fan club. Model agency.

Situation: Enslaved by passion. An untamed and unhealthy desire. Addiction to drugs. Uncontrollable lust. Desperate attempt to hide lack of self worth.

Creature: Mancipium. Lilith. Servant of Togarini.

Item: Gossip Tabloid Magazine. Nude selfies. Posters and photos of megastar plastered on the wall. Statue of the virgin Mary.

9. LOVE

Love is a bond that can be stronger than death. It can give you strength and purpose, but also drag you down and be your doom.

Individual: Man with a broken heart. Hopeless romantic. Marriage counselor. Wicked stepfather. Devoted spouse.

Location: Motel next to the highway. Cabin in the woods. Church in the countryside. Beautiful park in the city. Shop where you can buy wedding dresses. Dating site. Corpse buried in the woods.

Organization: Dating agency.

Situation: Madly in love. Unexpected feelings. Hidden relationship. Forbidden love. Unanswered love. Marriage ceremony. Honeymoon trip. Family incest. Social media update.

Creature: Creature of Passion.

Item: Plain gold ring. Marriage contract. Smartphone filled with romantic messages and pictures. Wedding cake. Bridal gown. Harlequin novel with underlined words. Love letter soaked in blood.

Hourglasses

The hourglass represents Time and Space, the prison binding us in the Illusion, but it also carries the hope of breaking the shackles and waking up. The hourglass also reproduces the Labyrinth that all cities are built from. It has a strong connection to Achlys and the Underworld.

1. ACHLYS

Achlys represents nothingness, infinity, the void, but also the obliteration of the very soul.

Individual: Severely depressed soul. Person in extreme apathy. Coma patient. Self destructive misanthrope. Priest who has lost his faith. Prisoner kept in total isolation. Careless deep sea diver.

Location: The vacuum of space. A deep well. Black still waters. Sensory deprivation tank. Bottomless mire. Depth of the ocean. Isolation cell with black walls.

Organization: Cult that worships She Who Waits Below.

Situation: Total destruction of what makes a person. Dissolved into atoms. Maelstrom that drags you down into the deep.

Creature: Children of the Underworld. Phantom.

Item: Sensory deprivation tank. Inkwell filled with black ink. Syringe with a lethal injection. The number π burned into leather. Suicide note.

2. FUTURE

Future revolves around things yet to come as well as potential that has yet not been unleashed.

Individual: Suburban fortune teller. Professor in predictive analytics. Reckless gambler. Infant from unknown parents. Stock broker. Young prospect. Tireless gardener. Sportsman aiming for the elite league. Aspiring politician. Tech genius.

Location: Orphanage. Highway being built. Construction site.

Organization: Future analysts. Investment company. Technical university.

Situation: Prediction. Complicated plots. Tarot reading. Fundraising event. Online crowdfunder.

Creature: Being from the future. The Eyeless One.

Item: Old pocket watch. A diary filled with predictions. A seed that has not yet been planted. A blueprint of a skyscraper. A biological weapon.

3. PAST

Past revolves around things that have already occurred and now come back, or could be discovered, if you look in the right place.

Individual: Nostalgic old-timer. Bitter antique dealer. Archaeologist who can't stop talking. Hobby historian. Dedicated chronicler. Member of a retro subculture.

Location: Forgotten museum. Ruins deep in the wilderness. Overgrown graveyard. Dusty archives. Old battlefield. University library. Family homestead.

Organization: Center for genealogy studies. Archaeological society. Online vintage subculture group.

Situation: Archaeological dig. Interrogation.

Creature: Being from a time long passed. Ancient creature from the Underworld. Forgotten god.

Item: Book with family history. A chalice from the Middle Ages. A photo of people long since dead. A folded birth certificate.

4. SPACE

Space represents someone or something that travels forward through space towards a goal or is always in motion.

Individual: Hard working truck driver. Philosophical backpacker. Cheating airline pilot. Restless lover. Tattered drifter. Psychopathic hitchhiker. Trustworthy taxi driver. Marathon runner with many secrets. Escaped convict. Child that has run away from home.

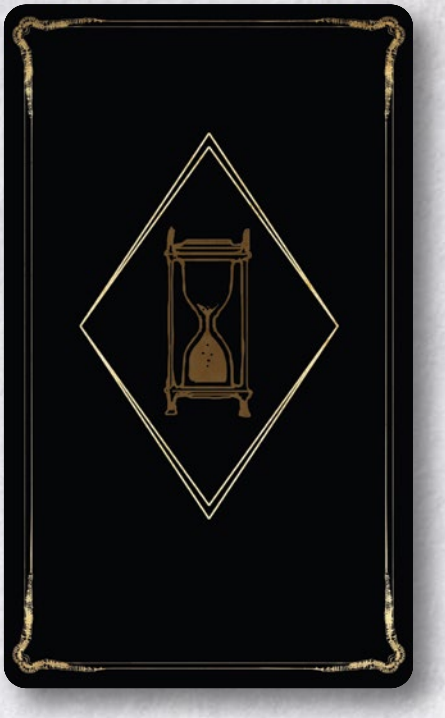
Location: Endless highway. Railway. Slow flowing river. Freight elevator.

Organization: Moving company. Shipping company. Human trafficking syndicate.

Situation: Boat trip. Train ride. Hunt. Speeding car. Information being transferred. Electrical lines.

Creature: The Crazed Dancers. The God of the Highways. Being that can teleport.

Item: Phone with GPS info. Water bottle. Pair of shoes. Passport.



5. BORDERLAND

Borderland is the place between two worlds or two states of being, or where Time and Space meet the physical world.

Individual: Bought customs agent. Immigrant with split personality. Foreign diplomat. Child entering puberty. AIDS patient close to death. Urban shaman.

Location: Place where the illusion is weak. Overgrown riverbank. Border control. High wall. Embassy building.

Organization: Cult that guards the borderland.

Situation: Existing between two worlds. An uncertain loyalty. Deal between two powers. Half awake. Between life and death. Status quo. Standoff.

Creature: Borderliner.

Item: Letter of introduction. Identity papers. Compass. Carpet knife. Folded map. Diplomatic passport.

6. HIDDEN

Hidden represents something that is obscured and hidden from view. It is strongly tied to the city of Ktonor in the Underworld.

Individual: Undercover agent. Illegal immigrant. Escaped prisoner. Inside man. Camouflaged soldier.

Location: Ktonor. Hidden sanctuary. Dusty vault. Panic room. Secret passage. Unknown trail in the wilderness. Smuggling route. Safehouse.

Organization: Spy agency. Secret hobo community.

Situation: Undercover operation. Staying away from trouble. Hidden meanings in conversations.

Creature: Child of the Underworld. Invisible Monster.

Item: Key to safehouse. Map to secret route. Ancient artifact. Buried secrets.

7. LABYRINTH

Labyrinth is a maze filled with dangers and confusion, and is tied to the Underworld.

Individual: Mathematician working on an unsolvable problem. Mental patient that understands aspects of the Truth. Cave explorer. Psychologist mapping the minds of serial killers. Old woman obsessed with puzzles and riddles.

Location: Sewer system. Twisting alleyways. Hedge maze. Dark cellar. Network of caves. Subway tunnels. Favela.

Organization: Cult worshipping the creatures of the Underworld.

Situation: Losing direction. Confusion. Ambush. Ending up on a place one did not expect. Walking in circles. Strange echos.

Creature: Cairath. Zeloths. Gransangthir.

Item: Old compass from sailing vessel. 1000 piece puzzle. Code written by a madman.

8. CROSSROAD

Crossroad is connected to two distinct paths, a choice that has to be made and two very different outcomes.

Individual: Woman running from her past. Pressured politician. Girl considering an abortion. Bitter marriage counselor.

Location: Crossroad. Road leading off the highway. Railway station. Stairs leading down to the subway.

Organization: Fertility clinic. Betting company.

Situation: Important choice. A tough dilemma. A break up. A shout that may not be heard. Child playing with a gun.

Creature: Pact-weaver. The Swap Dealer.

Item: A letter with life changing information. A Backpack. Slot machine.

9. GATE

Gate represents a threshold or obstacle that must be crossed or be protected.

Individual: Security guard. Self taught locksmith. Driven hacker. Middle manager with a rejecting nature.

Location: Bank vault. Door to an abandoned building. Passageway beneath a bridge. Manhole. Portal to another world.

Organization: Bank. Border guards. Cults that has sworn to protect a secret.

Situation: Something that needs to be opened. Something protected. Someone who keeps many secrets. Forgotten memories.

Creature: Guardian. Opener of Ways.

Item: Encrypted file. Book written in unknown language. Padlock. A red pill.

Crescents

Also known as the Moon, the Crescent is a symbol of the dream, the search for the unattainable, and the source of creation. The dream inspires and strengthens, but is also a crutch for the unbearable in life and an escape from reality. It has a strong connection to Limbo.

1. VORTEX

The very source of creation, dreams, and the ever transforming chaos that has its source deep in Limbo.

Individual: World changing visionary. Dangerous demagogue. Dream magician.

Location: The Vortex. The Dream World. Tattered dreams.

Organization: Secret order of Magicians. Sleep study clinic.

Situation: Chaotic and world chaining. A tornado. Maelstrom. A life that is turned upside down.

Creature: Dream Prince. Dream creatures. Dream magician.

Item: A magical artifact. Antique Persian Carpet. A dream in a bottle.

2. CREATION

Creation is the raw godly power to shape the world and to turn thought and dream into something inspiring.

Individual: Inspired painter. Renowned architect. Victim of a medical experiment. Mad scientist. Mute boy with crayons. Self-destructive black metal musician. Rabid movie director. Isolated 3D-artist. Razor blade equipped poet. Anorectic ballet dancer.

Location: Skyscraper. Hall with strange acoustics. Art museum. An ever changing dream. An old theater.

Organization: Classic Art Foundation. Artist collective. Gang with graffiti artists. Struggling record company.

Situation: A strange melody that moves through the air. Art exhibition.

Creature: Artificial creature that has come to life. Dying creatures from limbo surviving on beauty.

Item: Drawing board. Painting of one of the great Masters. Cursed music instrument. Paintbrush dripping with thick paint. An old photograph. Olympia Sm3 Portable Typewriter.

3. UNDOING

Undoing is part of the natural cycle of collapse and obliteration of ideas, structures, bodies, dreams, and whole worlds.

Individual: Cold hearted hitman. War criminal. Lawyer who dismantles companies. Terror bomber. Censorship zealot.

Location: Eroded building. Waste plant. Car crusher. Junkyard. Concentration camp. Abortion clinic.

Organization: Demolition company. Doomsday sect. Nihilistic suicide cult.

Situation: Cover up. Deleted information. Faked death. Wall street crash. Earthquake. Raging fire. A life completely falls apart. Burned papers. Explosion.

Creature: Cairath. Something that consumes and destroys.

Item: Bomber aircraft. Incinerator. Flamethrower. Vat filled with acid. Sledgehammer. Computer virus. Handgun used in war.

4. TRANSFORMATION

Transformation is a state of extreme change and metamorphosis.

Individual: Experimental plastic surgeon. Method actor. Makeup artist. Megalomaniac city planner. Extreme body modder.

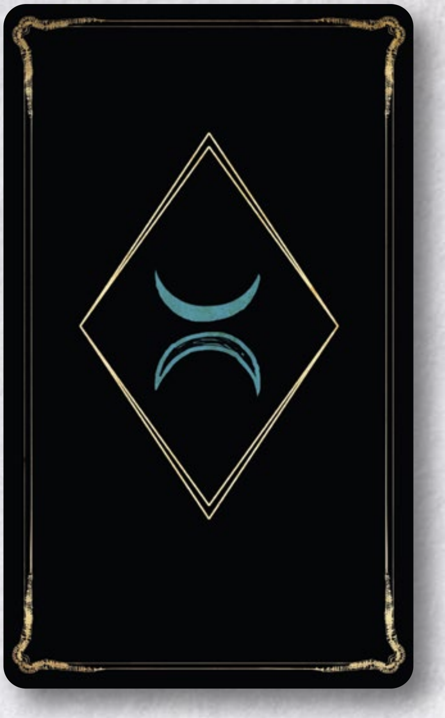
Location: Landscape architect firm. Genetics laboratory. Discreet clinic. Christian gay to straight conversion center.

Organization: Grass root political movement. Body modders.

Situation: Change of heart. Leaving bad habit behind. Terminal illness. Going through a sex change procedure. Government program. Removing face. Total makeover. Assumed false identity.

Creature: Shapeshifter.

Item: Makeup kit. Cocoon. Tool box. Bucket of paint. Carnival mask.



5. CONNECTION

Connection of intertwined structures, wills, or something that might hinder you or help you on your way.

Individual: Greedy fixer. Silver tongued lobbyist. Irritated network technician. Femme fatale with a harem of lovers. Street contact. Nosey electrician. Charismatic club owner. Sect leader.

Location: Group of islands. Small village. Caves. Crossroads. Railway tracks. High chicken wire fence. River delta.

Organization: Hacker group. Network of terror cells. Gentleman's club. Drug cartel. Fast food chain. Law firm.

Situation: Conspiracy. Trapped and caught. Bound. Expanding.

Creature: Tekron. Puppet master.

Item: Server network. Fishermans net. Spiderweb. Handcuffs. Power lines. Brain in a jar.

6. MERGING

Merging of ideas, bodies, and minds. Two things become one.

Individual: Good-hearted priest. Conjoined twins. Manager at the acquisition branch of a company. Charismatic cult leader. Married couple acting in unison.

Location: Where two rivers connect. Two cities that have merged into one.

Organization: Worldwide corporation.

Situation: An act of love. Sworn into a secret cult. Merges into the background. Minority assimilated into society. Myth and reality become one. Two ideologies become one. Two people prove to be the same.

Creature: Cairath. Being of Passion.

Item: Two plastic items melted together. A cross with a hidden blade. Vial with blood from twelve children.

7. REFLECTION

Reflections can reveal the truth, be deceptive or may mirror a person or a place.

Individual: Identical twin. Deceptive medium. Amature filmmaker. Hard working mime. Burned out performance artist. Honest singer songwriter. Well meaning Cognitive-behavior therapist.

Location: Still pond. Carnival. Hall of Mirrors. Rain wet streets. Desolate graveyard.

Organization: Malkuth cult. Philosophical society.

Situation: Mirage. Hallucination. Insight in the truth. An echo from the past. Double identity.

Creature: Doppelgänger.

Item: Shopping window. Mirror. Faded picture. Crystal ball. Old kaleidoscope. Stained rorschach test.

8. REPETITION

Repetition can be an endless loop, a recurring theme, Déjà vu, or something you can't escape.

Individual: Postman who reads the mail. Phone sex operator. Overwintered lecturer. TV-addicted shut-in. Janitor working the night shift. Suicidal toll booth operator. Mediocre stand-up comedian with two good jokes. Sleepwalker.

Location: Marriage chapel. Hair and nail salon. Government office. Cheap night club with the same act night after night. Amusement park with the same jingles and rides from 20 years ago.

Organization: Conservative think tank. Pharmaceutical company supplying the middle class with antidepressants.

Situation: Cover band playing the same set of songs night after night. Living on old merits. Telling the same story again and again. Déjà vu. Having to go through the same procedure once more.

Creature: Acrotide. Tekron. Nearly mindless spectre.

Item: Hamster wheel. Turned down script. Music box that plays the same melody.

9. STILLNESS

Stillness represents apathy, tranquility and a situation that seems to be unchanging.

Individual: Calm and seductive guru. Chain smoking housewife who has given up. Old hippie who speaks in riddles.

Location: Sleepy small town frozen in time. Suburban houses along a cul de sac. Japanese garden. Slow flowing river on the pastoral countryside. Ghost town. Abandoned drive-in theater.

Organization: Meditation centre. Research centre mapping human emotions.

Situation: A calm and quiet day. School reunion where everyone is exactly as before. Strict family dinner.

Creature: Lost god that has forgotten its nature.

Item: Sleeping pills. CD with calm and harmonic music. A painting of a desert landscape. Book with 12 steps to control one's aggression. Panpipe.

Eyes

The Suit of the Eyes represents Elysium, the enslavement of our minds and souls. It is also the faith that binds us, the crippling madness, and the rebellious, penetrating insight that lets us see through the Illusion.

1. ELYSIUM

Elysium is the very core of the Illusion and the intricate machinery that keeps you in chains.

Individual: Powerful politician. Leader of the clergy. Top ranking military. Owner of multi-billion dollar company. Media profile with high credibility.

Location: Government building. Cathedral. Historical monument. Occupied land. Religious capital.

Organization: Cult within the Army. The Sleeping Masses. Secret society among the top politicians.

Situation: Cultural values. Family gatherings. Traditions and national holidays.

Creature: Lictors. The Invisible Principles. Guardians of the Illusion.

Item: Book of laws. Political propaganda. Flag of the Nation. Blindfold. Sedative. A PDF with the US Constitution.

2. IMPRISONMENT

Imprisonment of your body, soul, and mind.

Individual: Police officer. Warden. Headmaster. Informer. Secret agent. Prison guard. Committed attorney. Strict judge.

Location: High security prison. Detention cell. High school. Bank office. Lending office.

Organization: Law enforcers. The School system. The bank system. The Judicial system.

Situation: Bills that need to be payed. Debts. Wanted. Educated. Declared an enemy of the state.

Creature: Eldermensch. Lictors.

Item: Handcuffs. Wheelchair. List of strict rules. Security camera. Surveillance drone. Folded Education grades.

3. FAITH

Faith that gives you purpose, but makes you blind.

Individual: TV-Preacher. PR-Person. Enthralled housewife. Die-hard atheist. Football supporter. Street preacher.

Location: Secluded temple. Old church. Sport arena. Grandiose monument.

Organization: Religious sect. Marxist Group. Terror cell.

Situation: Ceremony. Sport event. Prayer. Purging ritual. Money donation.

Creature: Angels of Chokmah.

Item: Rusty nail from the cross of Jesus. Religious garments. Brass pin. Propaganda poster of Vladimir Putin. First edition of On the Origin of Species by Charles Darwin

4. DISTRACTIONS

Distractions in everyday life that make you blind to the Truth.

Individual: Intrusive telephone salesman. The hot teenager next door. Street peddler. Charismatic internet celebrity. Famous actor. Gossiping neighbor.

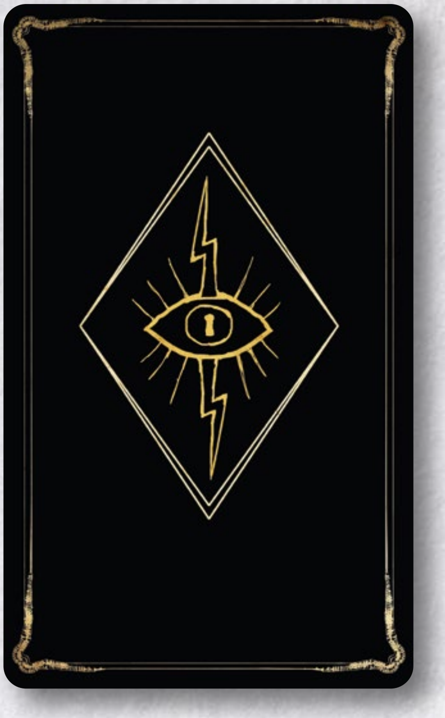
Location: Movie theater. Shopping mall. Vacation resort. Strip club.

Organization: Advertising Agency. Fashion house. Fast food chain.

Situation: Social Media Scandals. TV shows. The News. Podcasts. Twitch streaming. Commercials. Phone calls. Sudden sounds. The latest moral panic. Family dinners. Political discussions.

Creature: Mancipium, Creature of Passion. Something that is disguised as an ordinary person. Creature of Madness. Tiphareth's servants.

Item: Smartphone. Video games. Internet Forums. Porn. Billboards. Cheap alcohol. Stay fit-magazine.



5. DIVISION

Division keeps us occupied with endless struggles.

Individual: Online agitator. Alt-right member. Man hating feminist. Imam in the Salafi movement. Self righteous university student. Extreme nationalist. Conservative psychologist. Shunned writer. Holocaust denier.

Location: Social media. Online forums. Youtube. Basement hideout. Discreet meeting place. Conference rooms.

Organization: Minority ethnic group. Right wing party. Online hate group. Conspiracy theorists.

Situation: Political rally. Harassment. Death threats. Arson. Hate speech. Heated debates.

Creature: Servants of Hareb Serap and Gamichicoth.

Item: Hate propaganda. Racist pamphlets. The SCUM manifesto. Provocative song on Spotify. Essay about Foucault. Cartoon making fun of a religious prophet.

6. REBELLION

Rebellion and struggle against the ruling order.

Individual: Stubborn loner. Teenager with an attitude. Criminal. Charismatic political leader. Mafia boss. Violent neo-nazi. Gang member. YouTube Critic. Hacker. Anarchist.

Location: Occupied house. Underground Club. Home of a survivalist. Secret hideout. Bar outside town.

Organization: Guerrilla. Punk band. Extremist group. Animal Rights movement.

Situation: Revolution. Riot. Concert. Political rally. Demonstration.

Creature: Angels of Malkuth. Azghoul.

Item: Pamphlet with Propaganda. Spray can. Communist manifesto. Threatening letter. Steel tipped boots. Placard.

7. MADNESS

Madness that overwhelms and tears apart, but may also grant insight.

Individual: Distraught patient. Sadistic orderly. Deluded jazz musician. Girl who is kept hidden. Boy without a mouth. Wild eyed mathematician. Veterinarian who performs cruel experiments.

Location: Insane asylum. Isolation cell. Decrepit house. Apartment with torn down wallpapers.

Organization: The Fools. Psychological Institute. Sect in the trailer park.

Situation: Psychosis. Severe depression. Schizophrenia. PTSD. Anxiety. Panic Attacks. Neurosis. Paranoia. Aggressive behavior. Multiple personalities. Mob mentality. Mass delusion.

Creature: Creature of Madness.

Item: A half burned doll. Patient journal. Pharmaceutical drugs. Straitjacket. Scribbles on a city map. Symbols burned into human skin. Notes hidden inside a book about female hysteria. Envelope with 10 bottle caps.

8. VISIONS

Visions that may bring insight, but may also lead you astray.

Individual: Oracle in the suburbs. Self proclaimed prophet. Inspired Architect. Eccentric video artist. CEO of fast growing IT company. Mental patient.

Location: Old temple. Carnival. Smoky opium den. Asylum. Techno Club. Graffiti in parking garage.

Organization: Dream Interpreters. Pilgrims.

Situation: Nightmarish visions. Clear insights. Prophecy. Eyes gouged out. Rumors that speak of the Truth.

Creature: Being born of nightmares and visions. Augur.

Item: Super 8 Camera. LSD. Decorated clay pot. Webpage.

9. ENLIGHTENMENT

The road that may lead you towards Enlightenment and Awakening.

Individual: Amature philosopher. Magician. Savvy technician. Dedicated body modder. Scientist on the verge of discovery. Homeless beneath a bridge. University student. Broad-minded bartender.

Location: Road into the unknown. Twisted staircase. High tech lab. University.

Organization: A Cult that serves Malkuth. Research institute. Architect firm.

Situation: Initiation ritual. Science fair. Sect Meeting.

Creature: Child of the Night. Awakened human. Amentoraz.

Item: Map of unknown origin. Old floppy disc. Diary with mad scribbles. Forgotten blog. Ladder. Flashlight.

BEYOND DARKNESS AND MADNESS

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BEYOND DARKNESS AND MADNESS

Journey beyond the city's neon glow, snaking through fetid alleys and darkened corridors. Descend past echoing subway platforms and smothering steam tunnels. Follow the trails of blood, raining down from the streets and apartments above, perpetually fed by atrocity and sin. Explore the city's darkest labyrinths and ritual chambers, where cold concrete meets warm flesh, where shadows dwell and insanity reigns. Sink into soothing depravity and sublime anguish, where forgotten worlds wait beyond the threshold of darkness and madness.

Beyond Darkness and Madness provide the gamemaster with an assortment of cruel and delicate tools for creating horrifying narratives in a safe and responsible way. The book is divided into four sections:

Storytelling

The narrative aspects of maintaining the Conversation at and away from the table, as well as upholding the game's Agenda, Principles, Fiction, and Moves in the process. Tools and techniques for expanding and utilizing the Intrigue Map, as well as how to generate compelling events, monsters, non-player characters, objects, and settings.

Atmosphere

In-depth examinations of common horror themes and milieus, as well as techniques for using them to enhance the storytelling experience. Experience the wonders of body horror, extreme horror, existential dread, trauma, and the sublime.

Reflections

Reflections provide variant settings for *KULT: Divinity Lost*, opening up new horizons for players and Gamemaster alike to explore. By utilizing the techniques and tools presented here, the Gamemaster can create scenarios and campaigns tailored to the genres of action horror, Asian horror, magical realism, survival horror, uncanny horror, and young-adult horror.

The KULT Tarot

The *KULT Tarot* offers an additional Gamemaster tool for spontaneously generating plots, antagonists, locations, and allies when planning a campaign. It can also be used during play when introducing new locations and characters in the heat of the moment.

◆

Beyond Darkness and Madness is meant for an Adult audience.

You need *KULT: Divinity Lost* to use *Beyond Darkness and Madness.*

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